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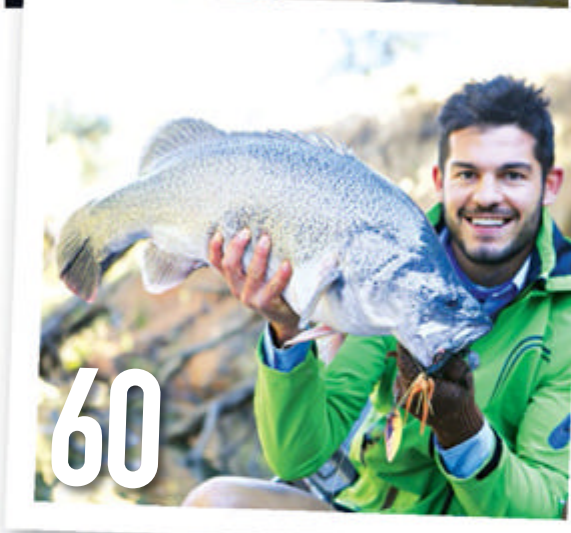
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MODERN fishing

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BIG TRIPS, LITTLE BOATS

8 days, 1,000 litres of fuel and over 1,300km by sea – the fishing adventure of a lifetime

Ever since I was a kid I have always been absolutely fascinated and inspired by the great Aussie icons that pushed the boundaries of Australian fishing and adventure. True legends like Malcolm Douglas, Rod Harrison, Malcolm Florence, Les Hiddins and many more, opened up a new world of modern pioneering and exploration that brought some of the most remote and wild fishing action to our lounge rooms. Scenes of taking a boat to the then mostly unexplored Ribbon Reefs off Cairns, catching metre barra off a handmade raft, casting expelled 303 shells for barra and jacks in the

Kimberley and long range trips to Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs are scenes that have been etched into my mind from a childhood of playing old VHS tapes so much that they wouldn't play anymore.

These are the blokes who weren't afraid to push the boundaries of adventure and ignore the naysayers who no doubt told them 'it can't be done'.

I think these days we live in somewhat of a cottonwool society whereby everyone has an opinion of why something can't be done rather than daring to dream. With the right attitude, sensible outlook and a hell of a lot of preparation, nearly anything is possible. With the safety gear, electronics and modern technology the trailer boat brigade have at their disposal, the wildest adventures are possible. The best news is, that you don't need to be the next Malcolm Douglas to realise your dreams, you just need to think big and start planning.

The first time I heard stories of the amazing sportsfishing that was available offshore from the remote areas of the Breaksea Spit off Fraser Island I knew I had to get up there and experience it for myself. When researching a trip like this I found many people who told me that it couldn't be done in my trailerboat as it was too remote and too dangerous. To some degree they were probably right, it's a massive distance on water just to get up that way and the bar is one of the most remote and dangerous crossings at the best of times. With the right planning and speaking to the right, like-minded people with real world experience in this area, I was able to make my first trip over the Breaksea Spit a few years ago. Each year since I've towed the boat back up there and done it bigger and better. I've just got back from my third trip up there and this time we spent a total of 8 days on the boat, covered over 1,300km on the ocean for just over 1,000L of fuel. It is the biggest on water adventure I've ever done in so many ways it's not funny. From catching marlin in a few feet of water on the flats to trolling the continental shelf, we did it all. Sure we could have swindled our way onto a charter boat, like most magazines would have done, but the adventure and experience wouldn't have been the same. To answer the big question, did we catch fish? Well, the full write up will be in the next issue of MF, but to give you a hint, my hands are so cut up by fish spikes and marlin bills that I can barely finish writing this column out.

Dare to dream big, and make that adventure you've been dreaming about a reality.

Cheers,

Shaun





WHAT DO YOU WEAR?



“ I wear Mako Polarised sunglasses because their brown lens enables me to see more clearly when I am fishing estuaries. It highlights fish against the bottom tones enabling me to sight cast to fish such as Barramundi parked next to some structure. The photochromic lens makes them usable in varying light conditions such as early morning or evening. ”

Scott Hillier G1HX (wears glass lens, brown base with high definition filter in photo chromic) Fisherman/Host Creek To Coast/Breakfast Radio Announcer.

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JUST DO IT!

Al reckons we should focus less on the ideal times and tides, and instead on just getting out on the water whenever we can

Recently I was on stage at the 4WD and Adventure Show in Sydney's west. Glued to the stage for three days doing multiple presentations is a bit like water torture for me especially when it's calm and I'm landlocked. However the next best thing for me is talking about my passion and those that know me, know it's hard to shut me up when I get going about my love of fishing!


The questions you get from the audience are always extremely varied from the bizarre to the brilliant, but the question that keeps popping up in nearly all my talks is "when is the best time to go fishing?" It's a logical question because we all want to maximise our time on the water to coincide with the best bite times. It is common knowledge that the tides, moon, wind direction, temperature and even barometer can influence fish's behaviour, in fact I have written countless articles about the subject to help improve anglers fishing skills. While we know these and many other factors play a role, they are rarely the deciding factor, instead it's often a combination of influences that seem to kick the fish into action.

The problem is however, that it's near impossible to know which combination works when.

So with this in mind, how do I answer the question? Well it's easy, the best time to fish is whenever you can go. Our lives are getting busier and busier which means we have less and less leisure time. As a result we don't have the luxury we once had to pick and choose when we can fish, instead it's a matter of just going when you can. Don't make excuses just go, because I guarantee that you will catch more out on the water than you will sitting at home.

The single biggest hindrance that puts a stop to fishing trips is undoubtedly the weather, especially for offshore fishing. I had a bunch of mates out from England a while back and with one day to fish I had grand plans of showing them how much better kingies are than their dirty old carp. However gale force southerlies put a major dint in our plans, but it certainly wasn't going to stop us. So instead of heading offshore, I changed plans and decided to fish any sheltered water we could find in the Harbour. This is what I love most about Sydney, or much of the Australian coastline for that matter, is that there is always a lee shore to fish, even in the worst of conditions.

While my crew didn't quite share my enthusiasm with such an ominous forecast they still reluctantly agreed and we soon found ourselves tucked away in a sheltered bay flicking lures about. The fishing wasn't awesome but flicking lures about is a very relaxing way to fish and for the Poms it was brilliant because every species was a new one with bream, flathead and even a few salmon providing plenty of excitement.

The best part was that we had the whole place to ourselves because the forecast had scared everyone else off the water so we could fish on, unhindered by other boats. To be honest it was really quite a relaxing days fishing in the end. So next time you have a day off, don't worry about the tides being wrong or the inclement weather, instead just work around it and go fishing. Obviously this column is not an invitation to be a turkey and head out on the water in dangerous conditions that you can't handle, instead what I am saying is to work around the conditions so you can still go fishing. Worry less about the tides and moon phases because if you have a line in the water you are always in with a chance. 



Al's philosophy is simple; 'fish more, catch more'. The more time you spend on the water, the better your chances are!

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CATCH OF THE MONTH

Congratulations to the winner of our Catch of the Month competition! Email your entries to the Modern Fishing team at editorial@modernfishing.com.au for your chance to win next month

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If you'd like a chance to win a LOWRANCE Mark 4 Sounder, send us an email at editorial@modernfishing.com.au

The Lowrance Mark 4 Sounder unit features track-back technology, a Mini-SD card slot and is valued at \$299 RRP.

Make sure you include a high-resolution photo and a bit of information about yourself and your catch. The winner of Catch of the Month will be decided by the Modern Fishing team on not only the quality of the catch, but the story behind it too!

LOWRANCE



BIRTHDAY TROUT

Dear Modern Fishing,
I love fishing and Dad took me to our cabin at Buckenderra for my 9th birthday. I have never caught a trout before and was really excited when Dad sounded up some big fish in 30 feet of water. He set up the downriggers with Tassie Devils and it wasn't long before one of the rods snapped up straight and then buckled over again. After a great fight I had my first trout and biggest fish ever at 3 pounds. It was a great birthday.

Sabrina Hains

WINNER!



Hi Sabrina,

Thanks for sending in your photo and congratulations on such a good fish for your birthday! Downrigging with Tassie Devils is still to this day one of the best methods for catching quality trout. For your top effort, we've selected you as the winner of this month's sounder. We hope you enjoy it and find plenty more trout in the lakes using it.

MF Team

GULF GETAWAY

Hi Modern Fishing,

Me and a bunch of mates took off recently on our annual gulf trip. With 20 blokes, 10 cars and around 10,000kms of travel involved, you can imagine it was a pretty epic trip! As good as it was though, the fishing was tough for the majority of the trip although on the last day we managed to pull 10 good fish from the one bank and it is a memory that will stay with me for the rest of my life. I can't wait for the next one!

Tim F

G'day Tim,

Sounds like one hell of a trip mate. With a crew of that size there would have been plenty of banter to pass the time while the fishing was slow anyway. Good effort on pulling it all together for the final day, it's those good days that you take away with you and the bad ones become nothing but a distant memory.

MF Team



BELLA'S FIRST BLUE

Hi guys,
This photo is of my daughter's first big fish. We live on Saibai Island in the Torres Strait. Bella has been wanting to go out in the boat for ages but the weather hasn't been kind to us, but today the wind and swell dropped enough for us to get out on the water for an afternoon fish. After trying baits in a couple of spots with no luck we decided to head over to a little creek for a look, on the way we trolled with some small minnow lures and Bella hooked a nice blue salmon but we lost it at the boat, we ended up trolling the same spot for a couple of hours and ended up with four trevally, a queeny and to finish off, we finally caught a blue salmon. With smiles and hi fives we were off to show mum the big catch!

Wade

Hi Wade,
Thanks for sending in the shots and story of Bella's first blue salmon, well done Bella, great effort! They put up a good fight on light gear and it's great to see a Father/Daughter combo out there catching a few together.

MF Team



PB SMASHING SAMSON

Hi Modern Fishing,
This is a picture of certainly my biggest Samson fish yet. I caught this monster, east of Bremer Bay in South Western Australia. We found this reef in around 35 metres of water and it didn't produce a lot of fish, just big Sambo's. My fish was around 1.40m and 30kgs. My Dad caught one around 1.50m and 40kg the previous day. I hope to be catching some slightly smaller versions on soft plastics and jigs soon.

Aidin Williss

G'day Aidin,
Awesome fish mate, you've done well to pull a fish of that size in such shallow water. They sure do breed them big over there in WA! Let us know when you knock a few over on the plastics and the jigs and don't forget to send us a few shots!

MF Team



*It's nice to have mates
out on the water.*



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GHOSTS ***IN THE SAND***

You can have your deep holes and bridges, the flats is where it's at! Lubin Pfeiffer details a phenomenal fishery where large mullet can be sight cast to in a mere foot of water!


WORDS AND IMAGES BY LUBIN PFEIFFER

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT MULLOWAY

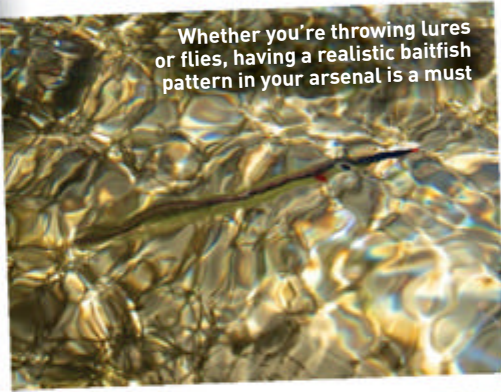
Big shallow water mulloway are really a 'fish of a lifetime' and it's not all that often that those fish come along, hence the expression. When an opportunity presents itself you really have to drop everything and go. A little while back I had one such opportunity to catch my very first mulloway from a calm shallow bay and I'll be damned if anything was going to stand in my way.

The plan was made to call in to work sick so that I could be on the water at dawn the next morning. At 4:00am the alarm sounded and I quickly got in the car and headed off. Little was I aware, that the coffee that I had bought on my trip over, would cause me to have an immensely painful bout of food poisoning. Who would've thought that after calling in sick to work, this would happen? Karma maybe?

Try as I might I couldn't keep anything down and after several stops along the way I really thought I was going to have to throw in the towel and just go to sleep in the grass on the side of the road! After rinsing my face off with cold water I eventually sucked it up and made my way to the fishing spot to meet up with my mate who lives on the coast. Ben Harris really has his finger on the pulse when it comes to saltwater fishing in South Australia's Gulf St Vincent. When he says you should come and do something because it's on, you know to drop everything and go!



A quality pair of polarised sunnies is a must as the fish blend in exceptionally well



Whether you're throwing lures or flies, having a realistic baitfish pattern in your arsenal is a must



There are few places in Australia where you can target large mulloway reliably on fly



While most of the fishing is done from the shore, a boat can be more reliable for chasing the schools out of reach



Prime mullet flats. As the tide starts to move in, so will the fish

After all that I had been through on the trip over that morning, I couldn't quite believe my eyes when I got out of the car to the sight of a large school of mullet sitting and feeding in shallow water. They were making bow waves as they moved slowly in what was only half a metre of water, their backs and tail fins sticking well out of the water!

After setting up the fly rod at warp speed, I grabbed the camera and we started to make our way out to the fish. Once we made it in to the water, stealth was needed to quickly wade out and get within casting distance. With my fly rod in hand I made a few nervous casts at the fish for no response. We followed them down the beach for a while before they came within reach of another cast. As the fly landed in front of the fish, which were now slowly moving along, you could see them turn. I held my breath as I stripped the fly before feeling it being taken and the rod loaded up. The line zipped through my fingers and on to the reel as I was connected to my first decent shallow water ghost. The fight lasted quite a few minutes as I didn't want to stuff it up. Slowly and steadily, I kept the pressure on as the fish did its thing out wide before being coaxed inch by inch into the shallows. It was a cracker of a first fish, at around 10 kg and just over a metre in length, needless to say I was stoked! Holding the fish up for a few quick pics, I was starting to feel that I could get hooked easily on this style of fishing and that is exactly what has happened. Sight casting in shallow water to solid mullet schools with their backs out in gin clear water, what more could you want!



The author displays a solid fish caught on a large baitfish pattern

WHAT TO EXPECT

Chasing mulloway in the shallow water in a calm bay is a whole different experience. They are usually slow moving, incredibly fussy, hard to see and really test all of your angling skills to the max. It is just like looking for ghosts in the sand although you won't be running scared when you do find them.

TIMES

The fishing we have here in SA is very seasonal. The fish start cruising in the shallow bays on both sides of the Gulf St Vincent from early spring and usually move on at the start of autumn. I believe that the mulloway are here to spawn, like a lot of fish species that breed in spring. They can be spotted at most times of the day with a low tide at midday being the easiest time to spot them. The sun plays a big part when polarioding, so use this to your advantage. If the wind is up it makes it difficult to pick up on movements, so you need to use the sun at the right angle to see the school. The sun is usually up enough around 10am which suits anyone that likes a sleep in. It will usually penetrate the water enough until it starts to set towards the end of the day. Once it nears the horizon there is too much glare on the water to be productive, that is, unless there is no wind and you can look for ripples.

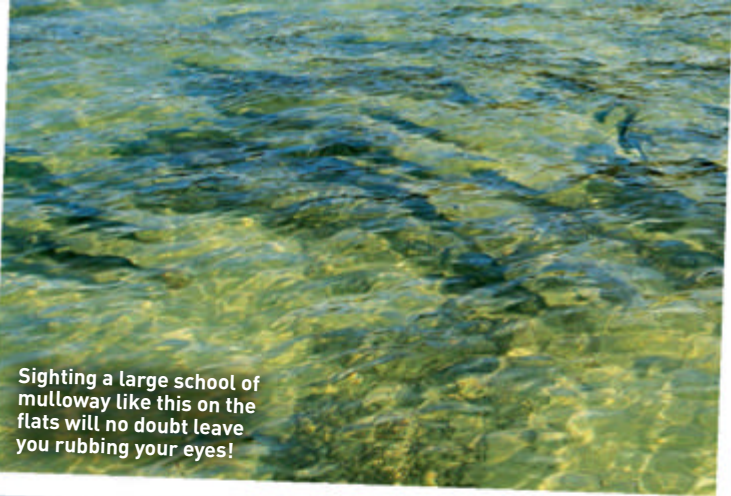


A selection of lures that have proven successful on the flats

LURES

Unweighted plastics would be the first preference for fishing the flats for mulloway. Either shrimp style or flick baits both work well and match these to a resin jig head rather than one that contains any weight in it. Storm's WildEye Twitching Nippers are great sand yabby imitations. As far as hard body lures go, shallow diving bait fish profiles are worth having such as Rapala's BX minnow or the MaxRap Fat Shad. Change the trebles over to singles so that the fish doesn't throw the hooks after the first run.






Sighting a large school of mullet like this on the flats will no doubt leave you rubbing your eyes!

TIDES

Tides play an important role in shallow water mullet lure fishing. The fish act differently during each stage of the tide and knowing when and where they will be will lead to far greater success on the flats. They are a smart fish and follow the tides like clockwork as they move around the bays which can also work in favour of the switched on angler's that take the time to learn their habitual patterns. From what we've experienced, the low water is where most of the action happens as far as the fishing is concerned. The mullet appear to like the safety of the weed line at the end of the sand flats heading out in to deeper water. When the water is low you can access the weed edge on foot fairly easily. It is then just a matter of slowly walking along, scanning the water as you go. As the tide starts to move in, so do the fish. They are well aware of the safety of having the water coming in with them as they start to search the shallows for food. Most of the sandy bays we fish for mullet have some form of channel in them. Whether it's only a few centimetres deep or a metre deep. When the tide starts to fill these channels the mullet use these to their advantage. Using them as a getaway spot while they move in to incredibly shallow water. Sometimes the fish have their backs completely out of the water as they move over the sand searching for food! They don't stray too far from the slightly deeper water though, and it always astounds me how easily they disappear once they get in to the safety of water that is only a metre deep. As the tide starts to fill completely and the bay starts to get deeper they once again become hard to find and we usually leave the water and wait for the next tidal movement. The run out tide is good to catch fish on, but we normally wait until it's closer to low water.



"I couldn't quite believe my eyes when I got out of the car to the sight of a large school of mullet sitting and feeding in shallow water"





“When its glass calm they can even start to break and splash on the surface like a salmon school!”

HOW TO SPOT THEM?

Mulloway would have to be the hardest fish to see in the shallow water bays around South Australia. Unlike most flats species they are exactly the same colour as the sand or weed, unless they are the slightly darker ones, they don't really stick out at you. I am always surprised that a 10 kg+ fish can be so hard to spot in such shallow water. Movement is your best friend when searching for these fish. If there is no wind around they can be incredibly easy to see but if there is wind, which there usually is, you must rely on your polaroiding skills to spot them in the water. We look mainly for darker patches in the sand and then wait and watch for any signs of movement. This can be as little as some tails moving or a single fish that has moved off the side of the school. Because they hang together so tightly packed it can just look like a smudge in the water. It's not until there is some form of movement that you even see that it is fish. As I mentioned earlier, mulloway move very slowly. So in most cases you're not going to see a school come cruising past standing out like the proverbial. That is unless you've spooked them and then it is too late! So the key is really to take your time, don't be in a hurry and thoroughly search each and every part of the water in front of you until you move on. I actually really enjoy the pace of this style of fishing as it means you have to outwit the fish. Kind of like stalking big brown trout in the backwaters of some New Zealand river, where they can hear and sense you're every move. As with all fish anglers sight cast, they are most willing when they are relaxed and not spooked so use this to your full advantage and move slowly while you scan the water.



Landing fish like this from a couple of feet of clear water is about as good as it gets



THE WIND

Most fishing can be spoiled by the wind and stalking mullet on the flats is no different. When there is no wind however this is when things get really cool. If there was one part I could control with this style of fishing it would no doubt be the wind. I've talk a lot about looking for them when there is wind about but on those magical windows of weather when the wind drops and the water glasses off, things start to appear in a way you never thought possible. It's kind of like pulling the plug and exposing all that lies beneath. Looking down a flat, glassy beach and spotting numerous schools milling around on the surface that you never thought were there is a pretty amazing sight that is guaranteed to make the steadiest of hands shake a little. Their tails and backs sticking out as they leisurely hang about together. When its glassy calm they can even start to break and splash on the surface like a salmon school! I'm not sure why their movements change as the wind drops, but I can assure you it will blow your mind what such a shallow insignificant bay can produce on those rare windows when the wind completely drops out. Unfortunately glass conditions during spring and summer don't come around too often and if you decided on fishing just those times you would get very little time on the water. Weather forecasts at these times of the year are patchy at best. Winds of less than ten knots are ideal for stalking the bays but no wind is a mullet's kryptonite!

FLY RODS AND LINES

We use 9wt outfits for all of our flats fishing. Matching them with both floating and intermediate lines. If the fish are cruising on top with their fins out then I will use a floating line. Otherwise it will be the intermediate I would be casting. The last few trips I've been having two rods rigged, one with the floater and the other with the intermediate, and this allows a quick presentation depending on the fish's mood at the time.

When the conditions are glassed out the fish act more like salmon, regularly breaking the surface. It is a delight to see!



LAND BASED

Land based would easily be the most rewarding way to catch a big mulloway. Stalking these fish on foot provides an unmatched challenge in South Australian waters and would be my preferred way to target them. I reckon for what you lose in opportunity in covering more water from a boat, you increase your chances by being able to catch them by surprise. Let's face it, boats make a lot of noise, even if you are using an electric motor.

We use breathable waders for all of our shore based fishing, unless it is really hot, because there are quite a few little nasty's around such as stingrays (jellyfish), stingrays, and small wobblygongs which can cause some nasty pain if they get given the opportunity. Waders will also protect your feet from the sharp rocks that sometimes are scattered around the bays we search for mulloway in. Land based fishing is best done, in my opinion, when the tide is low or getting towards low. Then you can easily search the weed line and the fish are not as difficult to see. The time between when the tide reaches its lowest point and starts to come back in covering the flats is primetime. It's amazing watching a school of 10 - 15 kg jewies pushing their way over the sand as they search for food while the tide comes in! Pack light when hunting on foot as you'll walk a long way if the going is slow, which it usually is! My normal kit is either one or two fly rods, a couple of spare flies, scissors, some leader and the camera. These items can be stowed in the wader pocket and that way I can walk a good distance.



SPIN OUTFIT

The fish on the flats are of varying sizes but there is always that chance of a 20kg fish so fishing on the heavier side is a smart option. If you only plan to carry one rod it would be a 2.1 metre fast action spin stick matched to a 4000 size reel. Mine is spooled with a thin diameter 10 kg braid which can cast lightly weighted plastics and lures a good distance with ease. I match this with a 10 or 15 kg fluorocarbon leader. Mulloway have a fair set of choppers on them and the fluorocarbon adds that extra bit of protection. A leader around 1.5 metres long is ample for this style of fishing.



Fishing like this doesn't come around too often. The author opts to release his fish in hopes for more in the future

FLIES

The fish really have a preference for garfish flies and my favourite pattern would have to be Captain Craig's Garfish, tied by Craig Coltman. We have both 2/0 and 4/0 versions on hand while on the water. The standout colours are blue and white, or grey and white with a small amount of flash. It is also handy to have a few squid flies in 2/0 and some tarpon toads. None of the flies we use contain any weight in them.

FROM THE BOAT

Most of the fishing we do is on foot for the shallow water mullet but heading out in the boat can be a productive option. Fishing from a boat allows you to fish all stages of the tide and cover the water more quickly. This style of fishing is far better from small open boats and simply wouldn't be possible from a cabin boat. Due to it being so shallow your boat needs to be able to move in half a metre of water. The best practice is to have a casting angler, who stands up the very front with a rod, and then a boat driver. That way you can steer the boat appropriately to get the lure/fly in the right spot to get a bite. Some days we use the boat purely as a vehicle to find and get to the fish and then drop the anchor, get out and chase them on foot. This can be handy with some of the bays having a large expanse of sand on low tide meaning a long walk until the water. Being able to launch the boat cuts down on time spent walking a long distance but of course this is only if there is a boat ramp nearby!

"Maybe there is an untapped flats fishery in your part of the world so get those polarised sunnies out, slide the waders on and keep your eyes peeled!"



Baitfish and squid profile flies seem to work best

Look for flats containing weed beds and small channels. The fish use these as highways to move in and out of the shallow water





If fishing from a boat, a dedicated spotter is needed to find the fish while the other positions the boat

LANDING THE FISH


Whether you are fishing in the boat or wading the flats it is easier to be in the water to land the fish. That way it can be kept in good condition to be released. Mulloway do tend to stress fairly quickly so don't stuff around too much if you plan to release the fish. Releasing the fish makes good sense and will ensure this spectacular fishery will continue for many years to come.

GETTING THE BITE

As I've mentioned a few times already, mulloway are very hard to catch on the flats on lures! From what we've come across you need to get everything right in the presentation to get the bite. Once we have found the fish, it's imperative to get ahead of the school. We are yet to get a bite casting behind the fish as you are chasing them down the beach. I reckon a fish that's unaware of your presence, in any style of fishing, is far easier to catch than one that knows you're there. So we position ourselves, whether we are in the boat or from the shore, so that we can present our offering head on. After we are in position, we will make the cast a little distance ahead of the fish. All the lures we use are very light in weight, so they sink very slowly, so you must give it enough time to reach the bottom, even though the water is only a metre deep. Then as the fish approach the zone you can either twitch the rod or strip the fly line to bring the lure in to life to induce a take. A big no-no is to lob the lure in to the middle of the school, this usually results in the school spooking. You want to be calculated in your attack. If the fish don't take, don't start lobbing haphazardly as you try to run them down. Reposition so that the lure can again be presented head on to give yourself the greatest chance before the fish move in to deeper water again.

THE FIGHT

Each and every mulloway we have caught on the flats has fought differently. Some are slow dogged fights and others go completely bananas. Getting the take is the hardest part and the fight is the part to enjoy. Sometimes after spending a good amount of time trying to get a bite the first part of the fight can take you by surprise. Just keep a level head and breathe once that line goes tight, either way you've gotten past the difficult stage and the fish is on the end of the line!

There you have it; a blow by blow account of how we go about catching the ghost in the sand. There are few fisheries that present a more exciting challenge than catching large mulloway in a couple of feet of water and we feel pretty blessed to have had the opportunity to do so. Maybe there is an untapped flats fishery in your part of the world so get those polarised sunnies out, slide the waders on and keep your eyes peeled! 



A double hook up, on fly, on the flats! This is truly unlike any other mulloway fishery in Australia

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TOUGH ENOUGH TO BRING YOU BACK.

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AROUND OZ- SOUTH & WEST

The first instalment of a two part tale on how good mates Ben and Crossy set out to travel the country in search of some big adventures and even bigger fish

WORDS AND IMAGES BY BEN HATHAWAY



It only took 12 months but the trip was finally ready to be embarked on. The plan was to skip Melbourne and head straight for the Nullarbor as Crossy and myself had already ventured to Yalata South Australia the previous year via the NSW south coast and the Great Ocean Road in search of some XOS size mullet only to be beaten by the weather, this new trip was to be round 2 and we had our game faces on. Following Yalata we would also be visiting legendary places like Steep Point, The Ningaloo Reef/Exmouth and finally get to Broome to end this first part of our trip all of which will be landbased fishing or in our little roof topper.

THE NULLARBOR

At a mere 2150km to our first destination we were unfazed by the length of the journey as we had a score to settle in Yalata, our first stop however was Fowlers Bay to get bait as most do travelling from the East. The plan was simple, 4 days catching bait and 6 days using it but unfortunately with this kind of time frame there isn't any room for error.

Upon arriving at our campsite we were pleasantly surprised to find a couple of schools of Australian salmon balling up around the rocky cliff lines, 30 mins later we were rigged up and chasing them around having a great time although the salmon were unfortunately undersize in the state of South Australia so they had to go back but what a great start we thought.

What we hadn't realised due to no phone reception was that there was a storm front about to hit the Great Australian Bight and it was forecast for the next week and a half, seriously

how bad could our luck be.

For the next 2 days we battled out the wind and rain for next to no bait, the wind and water conditions meant no squid and only a couple of measly salmon were to keep us going for the 6 days in Yalata. In the end we left Fowlers Bay a day early and made our way to Yalata to try our luck at catching bait off the beach as we have in the past.

I couldn't believe our luck as we had managed to get worse weather than we did the year before, instead of a heat wave and bad winds we had managed to score gale force winds and rain, now rain I actually enjoy when chasing mullet as the sudden drop in the barometric pressure often has a good bite behind it and on many occasions is when we would land a nice mullet.

Two days past with soapie (small mullet) after soapie being caught on every bait we chucked out in hope for more bait, even the soft plastics were getting hammered by the little buggers.



Crossy managed this lovely gummy shark which was lucky enough to be released as we had already



Massive salmon schools could be found en masse along the southern coastline and make fantastic bait for Yalata's jewfish population



Sunset in Yalata; prime time for a big jew and one of the joys of life on the road!

While we failed to find any XOS sized mullet, the abundance of smaller fish kept us on our toes for hours on end

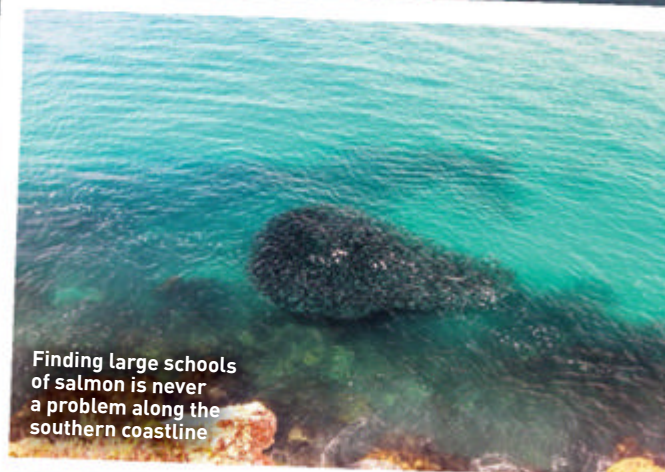
“At a mere 2150km to our first destination we were un-fazed by the length of the journey as we had a score to settle in Yalata”

We decided to change tact and our new plan of attack was to spend day 3 in Yalata then head off early to our next destination of Esperance, however we had managed to score a break in the weather on the day. Desperate for some decent fish we tried hard all afternoon, it wasn't until the top of the high tide that I got a legal one and dinner for the night, not long after and Crossy was hooked up as well but this time it was a tasty looking gummy, lucky for it we already had dinner sorted so this guy was going back.

Day 4 hit hard with the same old gale force winds and they sure do make it tough to pack up swags on the sand. Probably carrying 20kg of excess

sand in the car we made our way along the rest of the Nullarbor with sights set on Esperance.

From the research I had done I knew that there were big snapper to be had landbased just east of Israelite Bay in the Cape Arid National Park but I had little knowledge of the 4wd track coming off the Nullarbor so in the end we only made our way to Israelite Bay for some slightly more relaxing fishing. No set species for this area so we were happy with the few squid and trevally, we were more taken in by the spectacular landscapes around this area. The fishing slowed down a lot so we ended up spending more time 4wding around this area than fishing.



Finding large schools of salmon is never a problem along the southern coastline



A little salmon but a prime bait for a big mullet off the beach of Yalata

LEGENDARY STEEP POINT

Steep point had been on my bucket list for as long as I had been into fishing, to actually be heading there was hard to comprehend and how does one simply pack enough tackle to cater for all the fishing options available in this area?

At more than 850kms from Perth and 950kms from Karratha, it is nice and remote and the fishing reflects this. Literally within 30 minutes of setting up camp we were already into our first longtail tuna, at only 8 kgs it was a great start on light tackle. Now we didn't know this at the time but this was actually going to be our only longtail landed due to unforeseen predators.

In total I had brought with me \$300 worth of your basic \$10 metal lures because I was very keen on landing a Spanish mackerel off the rocks, but I had also packed countless poppers and stickbaits that had broken the bank but could be justifiable for a trip like this.

Ok so back to the fishing, we had planned on staying here for 5 nights with endless fishing action. Day 1 was just a little taster with the small longtail, longtoms everywhere and also fighting a shark on the game gear for 25 minutes before the 50kg single strand wire was bitten through.

Our camp was only a few metres from the edge of the cliff, some of the other cliffs around us were over 50 metres high so with only 50 metres

of rope for the cliff gaff we opted for a shorter drop. Day 2 really saw us getting good use of this virgin cliff gaff bought 8 months in advance for this exact spot, unfortunately our skills at the claw game were never that good so after dropping a tuna off the gaff and back into the water to start a blood trail we managed to tempt a few massive sharks and as you can imagine we lost that fish quick smart to the man in the grey suit.

Ok so next we will have to be quick we thought, but how wrong we were. Lure after lure we threw out to these marauding tuna for little result, these fish seemed to be making their way around the bay next to us every 30 minutes so we always kept a rod rigged and ready to chuck at these torpedos. Success finally struck just after lunch as we saw a few rockets flying around from the right, the 85gm raider was already rigged so off it went into the distance, in a matter of seconds I had one of the torpedos rocketing in from the pack with its sights set firmly on my lure. The initial run was blistering and it makes you a bit nervous doing the drag up whilst you are standing on top of a cliff but that was what was needed.

The fish gave me a false sense of security as I turned it and brought him

Not what you expect to pull out of the deep water. This bonefish came as quite a surprise to us all after taking a surface worked metal



“The sharks were unstoppable and for the next two days I went through every single one of my metal lures to the damn things”

Cobia provide plenty of fun from the rugged stony platforms that Steep Point is so famous for



towards the rocks, what I didn't realise though was that with all the previous fish lost, we had attracted numerous large hungry sharks to the vicinity and you guessed it, the estimated 20kg plus longtail tuna was engulfed whole by this truck of a shark before the cliff gaff had made it down to the water.

The sharks were unstoppable and for the next two days I went through every single one of my metal lures to the damn things so we had to finish the spot off with light tackle hoping the sharks wouldn't take a liking to this as much as they had with the ballooned baits, tuna and all the mackerel we hooked. Finally, Crossy gets one through the sharks and just by coincidence it's a shark mackerel! At this point I had lost a few more fish to

the sharks and almost got spooled on the Stella 10000 when a shark took chase of a tuna. To finish off our final day Crossy says to me he thinks he just got a bonefish, now if you know bonefish they like to stick to shallow sand flats and generally feed on small crustaceans on the bottom, well not this bonefish as it hit a 15g Halco Twisty on the surface in 15 metres of water!

It was a dream to fish Steep Point and it didn't disappoint. Although the fishing was tough due to the sharks, we still managed to land some good fish in what is an incredible part of the world. Very confused after the final bonefish encounter, we packed up and made our way to an area actually known to hold bonefish.



EXMOUTH EXPLORING

I am sure many of you have read of the exploits of Exmouth and stories people tell you, well I can assure you that the place is just as exciting as others make you believe.

We ventured in from the Ningaloo Reef side in search of some bonefish but with winds up and no end in sight it looked as though the weather had beaten us again and the fly rod was to stay in the car to gather more dust.

Along the Western side of Exmouth we worked stickbaits and heavier lures due to the winds where we also discovered how many emperor species were actually around, the only one that I could name was the spangled emperor and they were all in abundance on the shallow reefs.

Next stop was to a place known only as the Oysters in search of a GT, after spending a few bucks on a number of Nomad poppers I was keen on getting them wet. The hardest part for me was after doing all the research I was lost on just where to start around this area but there was no harm in trying. After plenty of hours spent lugging poppers around for only a queenfish I was too destroyed to try around by the Naval Jetty so our next stop was now Bundegi boat ramp to flick around for a

number of trevally species and some squid. After about an hour of action off the boat ramp we decided to launch the tinny and get some calamari for dinner, it only took 20 minutes to load up on half a dozen straight out from the wharf and all over a kilo in size.

Golden trevally were our next target and after a visit to the local tackle world we set off to some flats where we were assured goldens and all other sorts of trevally could be caught. This spot was apparently a low tide spot and I could see why, it took a 100 metre walk to get out to the drop off but as soon as we did we could instantly see why we had been sent out this way as there were fish everywhere. The only issue was we had to be in waist deep water to fish it properly and after sighting a few sharks it made us a little nervous. Stickbaits were my choice and Crossy was on the soft plastics but it seemed to be whenever the school of trevally would cruise past the drop off they would eat anything they could get in to which made for some seriously fun action, golden after golden followed by the occasional little GT until we might have pushed our luck with the sharks a bit too far. I was pulling in one of the small GT's and out of nowhere I had a decent 8ft reef shark grab my fish next to me whilst I was still waste deep!



We were informed of a healthy population of golden trevally on the flats and they didn't disappoint

My bowels were clear after that and I felt I needed to go and enjoy a few relaxing beers before I was back out there again.

To finish off our adventures in Exmouth we set out to explore the Exmouth gulf in search of the elusive mangrove jack we had heard about, but what I didn't realise at the time was that this was also the top area for snub nosed dart, also known as permit. I found this out whilst out in the tinny and all the appropriate gear was packed away in the car after driving over a dozen of the big dopey looking things. Of course I never found them again when I had the fly rod out. In the end we had a remarkably good session chasing jacks, it may have been due to the lack of boats around but every snag held a decent jack willing to take a lure, now we have a new found respect for this fish as trying to pull the red devils out of heavy snags was bloody intense!



The blue salmon were scattered through the gulf in numbers and there were some real monsters



Ed was over the moon with his first sailfish



BROOME SAILS AND QUEENIES

The final leg to tick off the South and West Coast of Australia was Broome, quite possibly the fishiest place in Australia so what a way to finish this part of the trip.

We had one of our mates Ed, fly over from Sydney to join in fishing this amazing part of the country for the week, the only target species was sailfish and we had pre booked a trip aboard Billistic Charters in anticipation for these spectacular fish but we'll get to that later.

Ed had been doing his own research on Broome before he got there and had assured us that we had to hit the local wharf as it was famous for holding ridiculous sized fish. Our first attempt off this wharf was slow rolling soft plastics off the bottom until Ed decided to try some micro jigging which to our surprise was extremely effective in getting the queenfish to strike. Sure enough moments later we all had 15-20g Halco Twisties and micro jigs bouncing off the bottom in 10 metres of water.



Crossy with a solid fish to finish off the trip



No matter where we went, we couldn't escape the sharks!



The Broome Wharf is home to plenty of fish and we found micro jigging small metals to be the most effective way of hooking into the local queenies



Crossy with an absolute ripper!



The author with a stunning looking fish that took a switched skip bait



The Spanish mackerel were about in between sailfish sightings

"Crossy in the end managed to outdo all of us with a monster 120cm queenfish"


They appeared to be the only thing interested until Ed managed to tempt one of the resident GT's and I mean resident as there aren't many people who can pull these fish away from there home and yeah you can imagine what happened next in the blink of an eye. Crossy in the end managed to outdo all of us with a monster 120cm queenfish and sent me running back to the car for the cliff gaff as this was going to be our dinner for a couple days.

Next up was our sailfish adventure aboard Billistic Charters, they had promised us sails and they didn't disappoint! Usually on a game fishing charter you are lucky to see a billfish let alone catch it, well on the first day of the charter we had over 15 come up to the back of the boat and all 5 on board got 2 sails each, only fish up to 20kgs but the numbers were unreal!

It was interesting to experience the

technique used which was trolling medium sized spin gear with 10kg mono, skipping live and dead baits close to the teasers. On plenty of occasions they would 'switch' the fish whereby the skipping bait would be sent out once a fish appeared on the teaser. It was a deadly technique and we had a ball watching these magnificent fish in gin clear water.

What a way to wrap up our final leg of the South and West Coast, we ended up staying in Broome for a week to continue on with the amazing fishing before we made tracks through the top end of Australia, one thing I wasn't ready for was just how wild the west actually is and I know we have big plans for the next adventure which will definitely include Steep Point and a whole lot more lures and maybe some shark repellent!

Stay tuned for part two of this trip where we cover the North and the East! 

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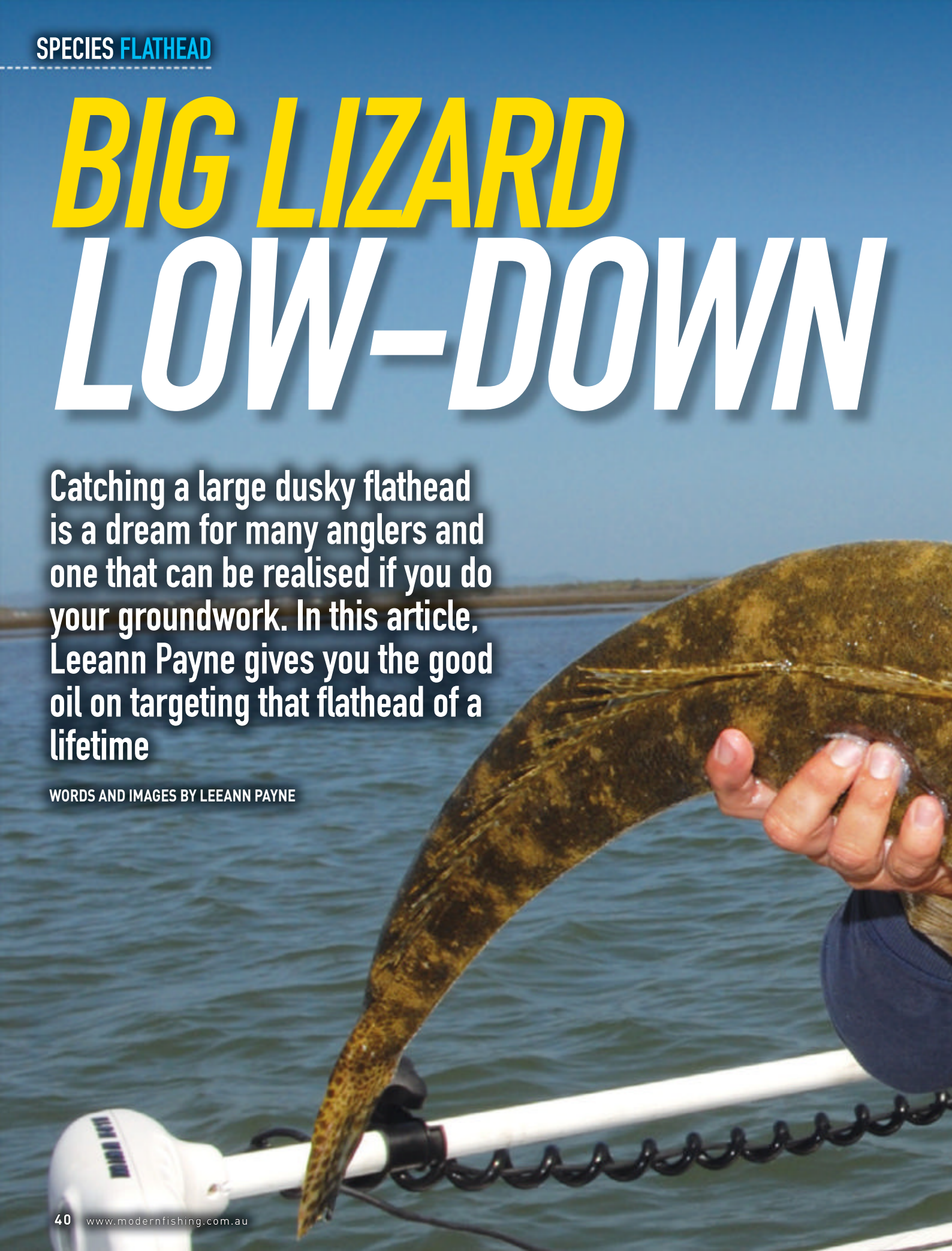
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BIG LIZARD ***LOW-DOWN***

Catching a large dusky flathead is a dream for many anglers and one that can be realised if you do your groundwork. In this article, Leeann Payne gives you the good oil on targeting that flathead of a lifetime

WORDS AND IMAGES BY LEEANN PAYNE





Wouldn't it be remarkable to have a fish wired to the point where it's possible to head out for a day on the water knowing that you're going to brain the fish each and every time?

Flathead are one of those fish that have predictable traits however to have them close to truly wired takes some time, years in fact, and even then they can outsmart any angler.

Additionally, specifically targeting large flathead and achieving one of 'crocodile' status every trip is a dream that most of us aspire to but few will ever realise.

Anglers that regularly catch big fish, and good quantities of fish, systematically explore their local waterways and note influences such as tides, water depth and quality, prevailing wind direction and bait location in the area they are fishing.

These anglers are at the top of their game and have a good gut feeling, born from experience, on knowing where the big girls will be on any given day.

SEASONS AND REASONS

It must be stressed that there are many estuary systems from Cairns in the north to around the Gippsland Lakes region in Victoria that hold dusky flathead and the period their spawning activity occurs varies from estuary to estuary. For example scientific studies suggest that in my local waterways in south-east Queensland, the spawning time occurs between November and February however large female flathead are usually caught at the mouth of popular flathead haunts such as the Jumpinpin Bar and Southport Seaway and neighbouring waters as early as August and catch rates slow during November.

Further south the spawning times are between September and March however the start and finish dates of seasons cannot be marked on a calendar as so many variables come into play that affect a fish's habits.

Fish reproduce by spawning which is the release of eggs and sperm into the water. Knowing when this occurs in your local area is the key to finding the big girls and it's important to concentrate your fishing towards the mouth of the estuaries and surrounding waters at this

time. Studies have shown that female flathead grow larger, faster as well as older than their male counterparts so it's likely that most fish over 60cm will be a female flathead.

When one flathead is caught in an area it's with every likelihood that others will be laying in close proximity. Divers have reported seeing big breeding females surrounded by many smaller males, obviously doing what nature intended them to do!

So if a smaller fish is caught during spawning season, keep fishing the area as his interest will be with a lady friend and she could very well be the next capture.

What constitutes a big flathead? That question can only be answered by the angler themselves as some will get excited by the capture of a 50cm fish whilst others consider anything over 80cm to be on the big side.

After catching a considerable number of flatties over a period close on thirty years, I'll put my hat in the ring and express any fish over the 70cm mark is a respectable fish from an angling perspective. My heart still misses a beat and my legs turn to jelly when I hook a big girl.




In between seasons it's still possible to catch quality flathead however they tend to be dispersed throughout the estuary systems



This fish was taken during an incoming tide in the area behind Rob Payne where an eddy had formed. Concentrate casts in these areas for better results



Mulloway are a bonus when flathead fishing. This fish was caught using baits



It's possible to use lighter weighted jigheads towards the change of tide in most river mouths

DEEP WATER TACKLE

When exploring the deep water towards the river mouths the best time to fish is usually towards the change of the tide when the currents slow as it's easier to use lighter weight jig heads and get a better feel of the bottom, and potential snags!

And when mentioning snags, it's a good idea to have a lure retriever in the boat for when your lure is ultimately snagged.

The choice of tackle used is a reflection of what circumstances will be encountered.

As an example in my local waters we fish between 3m-18m and use 3/4oz-1 1/2oz jighead weights with a hook size from 5/0 to 8/0.

When fishing with soft plastic/jig head combinations it's still best to use the lightest weight possible whilst still having enough weight in the jighead to keep it at the bottom where the fish are laying.

It's important to also note that when using heavier jigheads, sometimes up to 1 1/2oz, it is very difficult to set the hook when using a soft tip rod. The hook must be set instantaneously when the angler strikes back with the rod.

The hook on the jighead will ideally be strong yet have a fine gauge that will allow for better penetration and hook up.

Bulkier soft plastics sink slower and slimline lures are recommended. If the weight is reduced at the business end, leader size can also be kept down to around 20lb. With dozens of casts made during the course of a session too light a leader can break due to fatigue. A 3000-4000 size spinning reel loaded with 20lb-30lb braid is ideal to lift heavy fish, particularly where there is current.

White soft plastics work exceptionally well in both clean and discoloured water. Chartreuse and lime colourations are favourites but flathead can be caught on pretty much any colour.

ENVIRONMENT & THE FISH


Flathead are bottom dwellers specialising in ambushing their prey. They lay semi-buried under soft sandy, muddy and silty bottoms and are regularly caught in areas where seagrass is prevalent. They have a flattened head and body with an upright tail. Markings on the tail are referred to as flags and are used as an identification tool.

Flathead colouration varies depending on the area in which they are caught. Flathead caught over a sandy bottom are a "cleaner" lighter brown colouration whereas those caught in the vicinity of weedbeds are often greener and spotted with brown markings. The undersides are of a creamy white appearance.


Targeting big flathead during their breeding season at the mouths of rivers means that fishing deep water is necessary in a lot of instances. The environment will either be man-made and consist of rock retaining walls or otherwise natural, usually sandy, river mouths.

Bait is important and sounders give an incredible insight as to what lays below. No bait, no flathead! Bait can include anything from prawns, crabs and squid to small fish including tailor, herring, whiting, bream and mullet.

"Seeing that oversized brown shovel head materialise out of the depths is enough to weaken the knees of any angler"



Big girls are often found in the vicinity of weed beds



Proper handling techniques will ensure that released fish survive. always support the body weight.



Scott Fleming with his personal best flathead of 91cm taken on a trolled lure over the flats



Deep, clean water and plenty of structure just screams "big flathead!"



Don't be shy when using large sized baits/lures as these fish are more than capable of taking them.

TECHNIQUE

Bow mounted electric motors play an important role in boating and fishing nowadays and can hold the boat in position using gps.

They also allow for the boat to be manoeuvred through the fishing grounds without turning the key on the main motor which can possibly spook the baitfish and predatory fish in the area.

Facing the boat into the current with the electric motor, use the controls to alter the speed to stay in the area or alternatively bring the speed down to drift backwards to fish new territory

Cast the lure up current and allow it to reach the bottom before commencing the retrieve using a subtle lifting and lowering motion of the rod without using any erratic jerking actions.

Avoid slack lines as even the slightest "tick" on the line could be a big flathead.

Pay particular attention to the ledges and eddies as they are baitfish highways. Cast into the shallows and bring the lures back over the ledge into the deep water.

Hooking a large flathead often feels similar to snagging up to structure. They tend to bite the lure and then sit comfortably on the bottom until more pressure is added through the rod.

As with playing most fish gently, 'pump and wind' until the fish comes to the surface and net the fish head first. Do not use a gaff (don't laugh, some people do!) as fisheries regulations require large fish to be released, except in NSW where one fish over 70cm is permitted to be kept.

If a fish is to be released do so quickly and humanely. Measure them on a wet measuring device, handle them with care with wet hands as to not remove their protective slime coating, and if using pliers or Boga Grips, ensure that the weight of the fish is supported with your other hand. Lifting fish by the jaw can damage internal organs and although they may swim away, their survival rate is not good.

FISHING THE SHALLOWS

Although a good percentage of large flathead are found in the deeper water during their breeding season, the shallow waters adjacent to the river mouths also hold big fish.

When the season ends, the fish tend to disperse and become more widespread.

Fishing both an incoming tide and a falling tide can be productive in the shallows but it is highly dependent on the area as to where to fish. Some like fishing over newly flooded sand/mud flats as the perception is that flathead move up onto the banks to feed on baitfish. Others like fishing a dropping tide along the edges of banks when the baitfish and flathead move off the banks with the tide.

Favourable results will often come from fishing the edges of drop-offs, weed beds and eddies along the edges of a bank during a falling tide and pay special attention to the mouths of drains.

Trolling with small lures has regained popularity after many years of soft plastics domination and the results speak for themselves.

The champion angler at this year's Gold Coast Sport Fishing Club's Flathead Classic, Rob Payne, used Zerek Tango Shads and Lively Lure's Micro Mulletts for the duration of the competition.

Trolling both with and against the tide, Rob used his Lowrance HD59 Touch Screen to take note of the bait as well as the depth of water.

It was paramount to troll the contours keeping the lures at their optimum swimming depth. With the lure in the strike zone, dozens of fish were taken over the three day tournament. Every time a fish was caught, his team turned around and fished the area again.

It should be noted that although he was fishing the flats towards the Jumpinpin Bar region most of the fish were under 70cm with the exception of a large 91cm flathead that team-mate Scott Fleming caught. Targeting big fish in these areas is a numbers game. Your chances are more lottery like in the shallows.

Casting with 3-5" plastics, vibes and metal spoons across the shallows/edges is a fruitful way to fish.

I'm of the opinion that it's a good idea to use plastics in conjunction with a lead jig head that is weighted heavily enough to stay near the bottom when retrieved.

Simply it's just a matter of "hopping" the plastic across the bottom using



Netting a big flattie is make or break time. Always net the fish head first and let the angler guide the fish to the net.

a couple of quick upward lifts of the rod tip. Ensure that you leave a good length pause between the jigs as it's often at this time the flathead will take the lure.

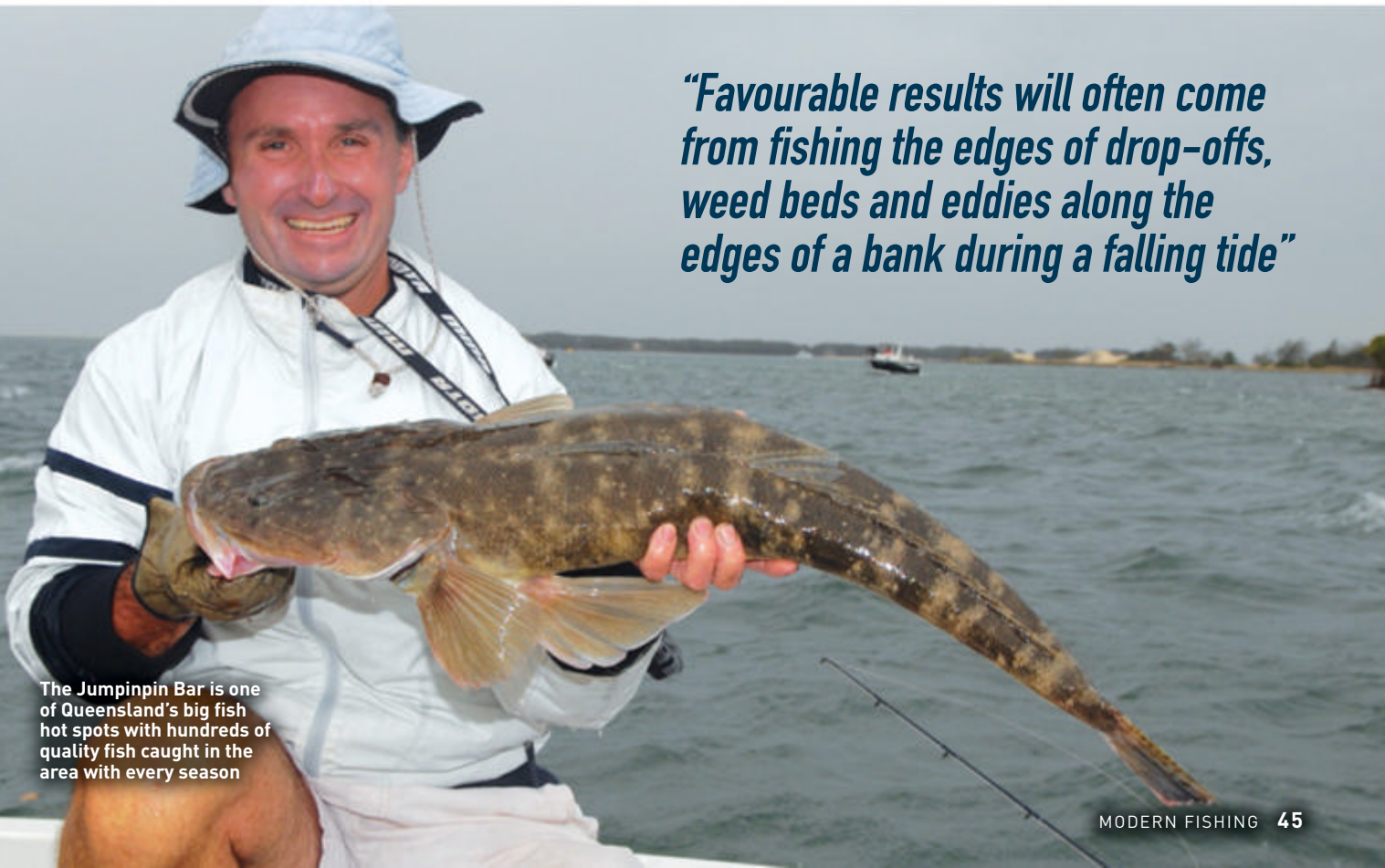
Vibes require little work and instead of an erratic jigging action, use a slow lifting of the rod before lowering the rod tip again whilst winding up the slack line.

When using soft plastics and vibes from a boat or when land based always keep on the move to cover new ground.

Generally in the shallows anglers can get away with lighter tackle including spinning rods of at least 7ft in length used with a 2000 size spinning reel. Spool the reel with approximately 12lb PE line with a leader up to 15lb.

Although the leader may seem towards the light side for these fish if the fish is lip hooked, and they often are, you won't have a problem bringing the fish in.

"Favourable results will often come from fishing the edges of drop-offs, weed beds and eddies along the edges of a bank during a falling tide"



The Jumpinpin Bar is one of Queensland's big fish hot spots with hundreds of quality fish caught in the area with every season

BAIT FISHING

As a renowned scavenger flathead will take most baits including live paddy mullet, hardie heads, whiting, herring, W.A. Pilchards, whitebait and frogmouth pilchards. Flesh baits are ideal with mullet, tailor, whiting, garfish and tuna strips good starters. Worms, prawns, yabbies and eugaries will usually account for smaller specimens.

Drifting in a boat using bait allows more ground to be covered and fish generally take a moving bait with more gusto.

If anchoring, cast and retrieve the bait slowly or otherwise cast up current and let the bait drift back with the current. Fish in the same areas as mentioned before as deep water soft plastics jigging, particularly the river mouths during spawning season.

Fishing the deeper water does require heavier tackle simply due to

the amount of weight in the sinker that is required to be used. A trace of approximately 20lb fluorocarbon line should be sufficient however wire is not recommended.

To counteract the tendency of a flathead to see saw its way through a leader use a long shanked hook with your baits. Smaller fish baits can be used with a gang of three hooks.

Paternoster rigs with two hooks is a great way to drift for flathead. A mix of baits can be used and it's less likely that your sinker will get caught on the bottom unlike a gang of hooks. Whether fishing from a boat or land based always use a landing net for the final stage of the fight.

Too many fish are lost when a flathead is lifted from the water and it gives that one final thrashing for its freedom. Always check your leader for damage after catching flathead. If chafed, retie the lure/jighead/hook back on.

"My heart still misses a beat and my legs turn to jelly when I hook a big girl"



Fishing in deep water requires jig heads that are weighted sufficiently to suit the current



This 75cm flathead was caught by Brian James. In Queensland fish of this size are permitted to be kept




A prime example of a big breeder taken near the Jumpinpin Bar mouth during breeding season

SHORE FISHING

If fishing from the shoreline many fish can be located within spitting distance of the foreshore so work that area with your lures and baits firstly before wading up to your thighs to cast lures.

If a current is apparent throw lures and baits up current and retrieve them. Once the lure is retrieved against the current wind in and start again. Boat owners that use lures are always on the move so if you're land based, do the same thing. You have to find the productive water, the fish aren't going to find you.

It doesn't matter what your preferred style of fishing is, flathead will respond to it all on the right day and specifically targeting the big girls can be highly rewarding when it pays off. Seeing that oversized brown shovel head materialise out of the depths is enough to weaken the knees of any angler and the feeling of cradling that prize fish for a few quick snaps is pretty hard to top! 



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Big Boss II 6000	6+1	25lb mono/150m	4.9:1
Big Boss II 7000	6+1	25lb mono/250m	4.9:1
Big Boss II 8000	6+1	30lb mono/240m	4.9:1
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LOCATION CAPE YORK PENINSULA

CAPE YORK ***BY MOTHERSHIP***



On the bucket list of nearly every red blooded Aussie angler is a trip down the western side of Cape York via mothership. Shane Murton finally ticked it off his list and can't recommend it enough

WORDS AND IMAGES BY SHANE MURTON

LOCATION CAPE YORK PENINSULA

When pondering the many 'must do' fishing trips around the country, a week spent cruising the far north of Queensland along the Cape York Peninsula has to be right up there with the best of the best scenarios on offer.

For a southerner like myself the attraction is obvious, with swarms of lure-hungry fish and warm weather being the standout reasons. More specifically however the sheer volume of options has to be admired, with remote flats, rivers and inshore areas offering up a bevy of silver slabs with fins with a seemingly insatiable craving for lures and flies. Combine the fishing with remoteness and you have the recipe for a delicious mix that would have any red-blooded fisho drooling uncontrollably I'm sure!

After years of salivating at the prospect of checking out Cape York myself, finally an opportunity arose on a week-long mothership effort with Eclipse FNQ Charters courtesy of owner/operators and gun hosts Bianca and Joe. The whole experience lived up to the hype and its 'dream trip' status and left me wanting more.



The author and his permit. These fish are unbelievably hard fighters and Eclipse have them worked out

There were solid barra to be caught. There's much more to these FNQ rivers however than just barra with most saltwater species pushing into these systems as well



"The species diversity in the rivers paves the way for some consistently crazy sessions"



If you like fly fishing and light-tackle lure casting this place is heaven!



Rod sets his permit free. A highly satisfying feeling for any fly fisho!



Doing it tough! Nothing like a BBQ on the beach to break up a day on the water. Having so many creature comforts makes a trip to such a remote area unbelievably good!



Fingermark love vibes and are quite prolific in many of the rivers you'll fish

MOTHERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Fishing and cruising this coastline by mothership really is the ultimate way to take in the Cape, and offers you all the comforts of home (and more!), and importantly provides a mobile base which extends your range considerably allowing you to prospect much of this vast area. With tenders in tow switching areas and chasing a hot bite is easy to do, while beginning each day 'on location' is a massive bonus from a fishing perspective and means you're right in the thick of the action from the get-go with very little idle time (unless you want to kick back on the top deck with a brew that is!).

Many of the mothership location changes were done at night or while we were out fishing. This is planned to cause minimal interruption to fishing time and each day was kept fresh as we explored the rivers of the area, each of which had its own unique feel, and in the case of the moorings, unique visitors.

On basically all of the moorings

we were visited by sharks of various species and those amazing QLD groper with their daunting bulk and fearless attitude. Hand feeding these true oceanic giants and watching them explode on a dead fish offering, showering you with water in the process, left a lasting impression on all of us and ensured toes were kept well away from the water at all times!

Eclipse run a refurbished 16m aluminium power catamaran and it really is like a floating palace. Fully air-conditioned, with bunk-style accommodation and large galley etc. You really feel privileged to be spending a day out fishing in such a rugged and remote location only to come back to a slice of luxury at the end of the day and completely recharge the batteries for another round.

Having such comforts is great no doubt about it, but this is also a hardcore fishing trip to an extremely desirable angling destination, so it can't be all clean sheets, cold drinks and top-notch tucker. How about the fishing?

Trolling late in the day can be a productive technique for mackerel, tuna and more



Feeding some of the regulars on the mooring!



Hand feeding the large groper in the rivers is always entertaining

Rod and guide Pete (right) display Rod's fly-caught permit before release. FNQ is the place to go if you want to consistently catch these enigmatic fish



FLAT-OUT ON THE FLATS

I guess if you put your thinking cap on and tried to come up with two iconic Cape York fishing situations, fishing the flats would have to make the cut. This entire coastline has untold amounts of lowly fished sandy shoreline and shallow banks that come alive when covered with water, and these zones are the frontlines of a fish war that unfolds each and every incoming tide.

What makes this fishing so highly addictive is watching black shapes of all sizes slowly make their way across a sandy expanse, or at times hold stationary feeding. If you're a lure or fly fisher you can't help but get twitchy with excitement at such visual encounters with big fish in ultra-shallow water - this is a slice of sportfishing heaven!

A key to cashing in on this fishing is positioning yourself to intercept the fish as they come into the shallows following the rising water - this is where the Eclipse guides (Nathan, Chris and Pete) really payed for themselves. Drains and channels, no matter how shallow, are the first places to hold fish life on a rising tide, and having a well positioned boat basically meant we didn't have to move as steady amounts of fish would be coming towards us, or at least within close proximity. Timing is critical however, as the water gets deeper the fish spread out on the flats and aren't as concentrated, so you have to take chances or you'll be waiting until the following day for some fishy retribution.

We had some sizzling sessions anchoring up on the shallow side of a drop-off at a likely entry point to a flat, often near a river mouth, and got stuck into some serious fish with packs of metre plus queenfish, golden trevally, barra, giant herring, milk fish, GTs and those masters of mystery, the permit, all regulars. The flats are so lively and at times we didn't know where to look, or cast, as packs of fish streamed towards us and casts were heaved in all directions. Some presentations were met with a hyped-up predator open mouthed rushing the lure, while others were snubbed by a fish on the move, not interested in what we were serving. The second the lure or fly hit the water you'd immediately sense the intentions of the fish though and it was that split second you'd hold your breath waiting to see what events would transpire.

A keen eye and early spotting of your quarry is essential for making the perfect cast before they get too close to the boat and spook. This said, when you get a pack of queenies or goldens fired up they'll nearly eat the lure from your rod tip! We had the opportunity to get out and walk the shoreline as well, but the height advantage of being on a



The flats fishing of the area is second to none. Sight casting to packs of big queenfish in shallow water is simply wild fun!



The author with a giant herring caught vibing a shallow beach



On a rising tide the flats come alive in this area with all manner of fish filing into the shallows to feed

"If you're looking to score a permit this area rates highly amongst aficionados of the species, and there's no doubt you'll get chances at them"

The mothership Eclipse towing its entourage of tenders to the next destination

boat aided with fish spotting considerably, and the ability to cast right around the guide boats made it by far the more productive option.

If you're looking to score a permit this area rates highly amongst aficionados of the species, and there's no doubt you'll get chances at them. Being my first taste of permit fishing (not that I was targeting them specifically myself) I can see the challenge as they're undoubtedly one of the more fickle feeders on the flats, and they tend to bob up quite sporadically meaning you need more than a few factors in your favour to get the hook-up. I was lucky enough to score one on a soft vibe, after being belted earlier in the session by a fish and missing it, while fly fishing fanatic Rod realised his angling dream by conquering the species on the long wand and a crab fly - a great achievement and satisfying to the core for him I bet.

For my liking you can put the blinkers on and hunt permit, but even the most ardent chasers of the species can't totally ignore the flats variety. We saw monster GTs, barra on the river flats through to nearly any saltwater inshore species you care to mention up in the shallows. There's scope to use a mixture of techniques for this fishing, with poppers, vibes, fly and hard-bodies all having their place. A long casting outfit with at least 200m of line is advisable and I had a ball using a 6-kilo outfit trying to tame some rather hot-to-trot fish.

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RIVERS APLENTY

There's a bundle of different river systems in both directions on the peninsula to fish.

Heading north the main bunch we worked were the Wenlock, Ducie, Skardon, Jackson, McDonald and Doughboy, however you can tailor your trip at the request of Eclipse if required, but I'm sure you'll be kept plenty busy fishing these!

Each waterway provided a contrasting experience, both in terms of the species, but also the fishing styles that came into play and the various holding points for the fish. The rivers of the Cape differ from what you expect if you're accustomed to fishing the Top End for example. Many have far superior water clarity and what surprised me was the diversity of saltwater

species freely swimming in from the ocean up the rivers each day. This makes the fishing more of a lotto and each big hook-up keeps you guessing and with thumper queenies, GTs, giant herring and goldens on the hit list you can be forgiven if you get distracted from the barra!

While the barra fishing can go off the chain when you strike it right, with both size and numbers, the river fishing here is more about variety than necessarily having a 'barrathon' each time you hit the water. This being said all the rivers do have barra, with the standout we fished the Wenlock, but hot action was had in most. In some of the clearer systems the barra fishing is less about working drains and more about flicking the fringing

flats and working the timber and rocks. We even pushed right up into the fresh in certain systems and fished the pinched in headwaters with some success on barra, saratoga and tarpon, with sooty grunter also on the cards. The changing moods as you move up these rivers is brilliant and sitting back and absorbing the scenery like a sponge is utterly soul-soothing when you haven't got a rod in hand.

The species diversity in the rivers paves the way for some consistently crazy sessions and allows you to change your approach if one fish type clearly isn't on the chew and still have a

stellar day out. A species I didn't expect to encounter in numbers in the rivers were black jew, and as it turns out I had one of the best light-tackle sessions of my life when guide Nathan took us to a rock he'd found in one of the rivers which produced continual big hook-ups for much of the first day of the trip. Using a well weighted 125mm Samaki Vibelicious and getting towed all around the river by jewies over a metre that were hooked in quite shallow water on sporty gear was as good as it gets for me. We got seriously smashed up by a few but managed to pull plenty away from their reefy comfort zone.

A very nice estuary-caught fingermark held up by guide Nathan



The author with his best black jewie of the trip taken on relatively light tackle using a Samaki Vibelicious - great river fishing!



The estuary fingermark fishing of FNQ is second to none and working any rocky areas you're likely to encounter these. We had some memorable lure sessions catching scores of fingermark to over 40cm with a deep-worked vibe or soft plastic usually their undoing. Often joining them were mangrove jack,

which are quite common in the rivers. One massive jack session was had in a land-locked pool after the guides deliberately got us stuck in a river on low tide to try something different. This shallow pool produced countless barra, catfish and jacks - epic sessions like this are why you come on these trips!

REEFS & PELAGICS

The inshore reef and pelagic fishing of Cape York is also pretty darn great as you'd expect. I think it took under a minute of fishing just after unloading our gear on the mothership to hook our first longtail tuna of the trip!


Mack and longtail tuna, cobia and various mackerels are prolific close to shore here, and are particularly active during the low light periods where you'll see bust-ups become more numerous. Trolling around surface activity or throwing lures into the fray are proven ways to get bent up. We had some brilliant tuna sessions, catching them on stickbaits and metal slugs as the water literally foamed all around the boat. The hardest part was deciding which school to fish!

The best part of this fishing is that it occurs so close to the rivers, and you usually don't have to look hard to find it. Topping up with a few tasty yet sporty tuna or mackerel complements the river and flats fishing so well and adds to what can be an amazingly diverse day on the water.

Another facet of the area is the reef scene, if you aren't already overwhelmed with possibilities! This isn't deep water fishing, but rather it's quite shallow making it ideal for lightly weighted plastics and vibes.

Good fingermark, bluebone and most other inshore tropical reefies are possible. One of the most enjoyable sessions for me was hopping in the boat with a couple of guides and checking out a reef at night, which under the cover of darkness had lit-up with fish life and was producing some serious hook-ups on cracker fingermark and cod and it was a great last session to finish the trip on.

Booking a mothership trip to Cape York is something all fishos should do before they die, and the dollars are well justified given the remoteness and the level of comfort you're privy to in conjunction with some of the best estuary and inshore fishing you'll experience. Hand on heart it was one of the best weeks of fishing I've had, and not just because of the fish decked either, but the total package - scenery, big sunsets, fish, food and the company in what is simply a remarkable part of the country.

Eclipse FNQ Charters offer a range of charter options on the Cape York and other QLD locations as well. You can contact them on enquiries@eclipsefnq.com.au or for further information visit: www.eclipsefnq.com.au 



The author and a topwater longtail caught during a fast paced session late one afternoon



There's so much water to prospect it's almost impossible not to catch fish here!



Leon with a longtail tuna caught only minutes after unloading our gear on the mothership. This place is fish-loaded!

Eclipse are well equipped to take you into all the rivers of the area with their range of tenders

"We had some brilliant tuna sessions, catching them on stickbaits and metal slugs as the water literally foamed all around the boat"

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VIEW RANGE



DURABILITY MEETS SUPER COMFORT



XL100



SPYDER

SONIC

STRETCHERS

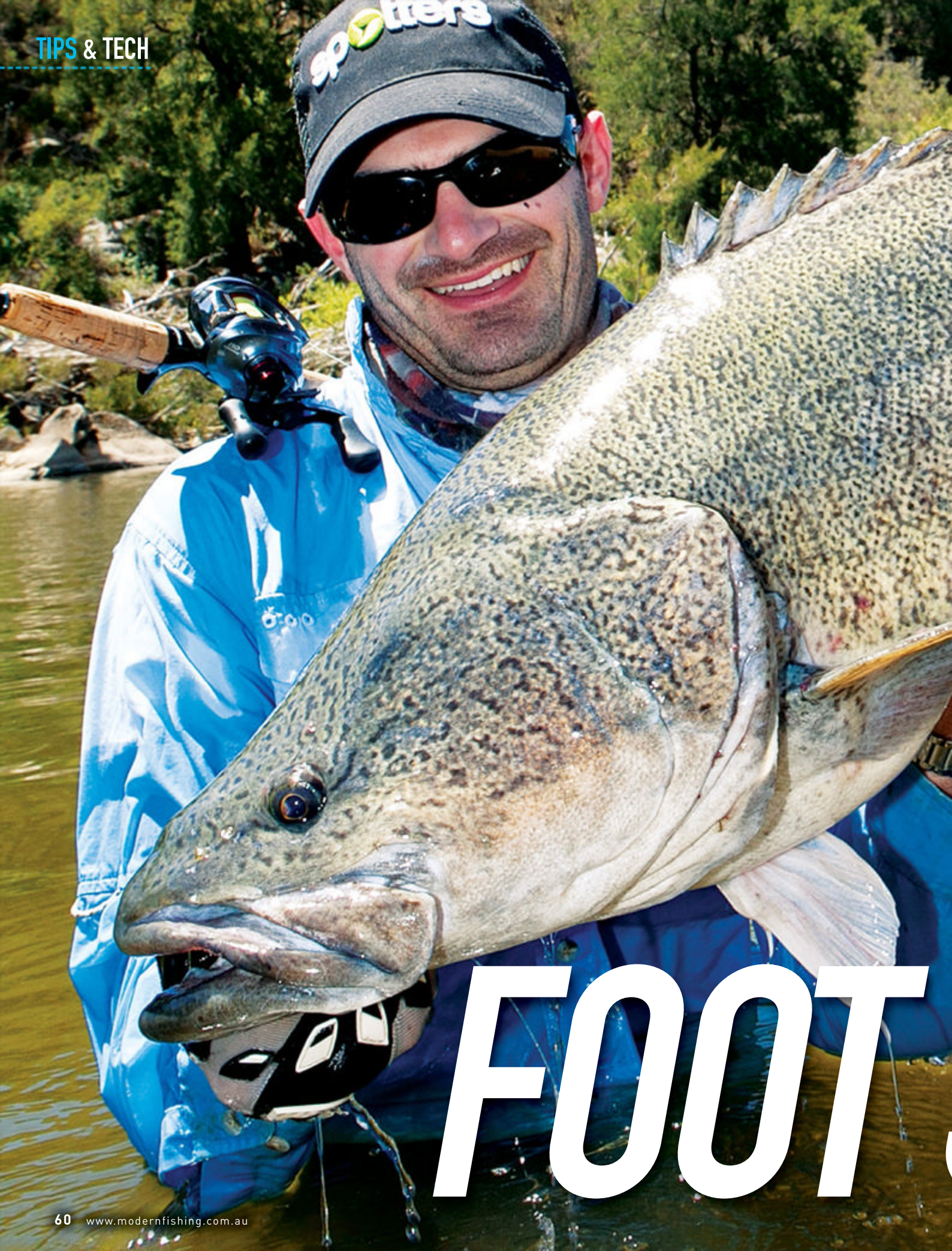
All Darche stretchers feature smooth profiles ensuring no snag, robust frames for great stability, fold easy for storage and transport, and come with a convenient carry bag.

Uniqely, the XL100 is 100cm wide ensuring optimum room and can be used as a base with your favourite swag. The Sonic is super fast to set up – simply unfold, whilst the Spyder is a high quality ground hugging stretcher.

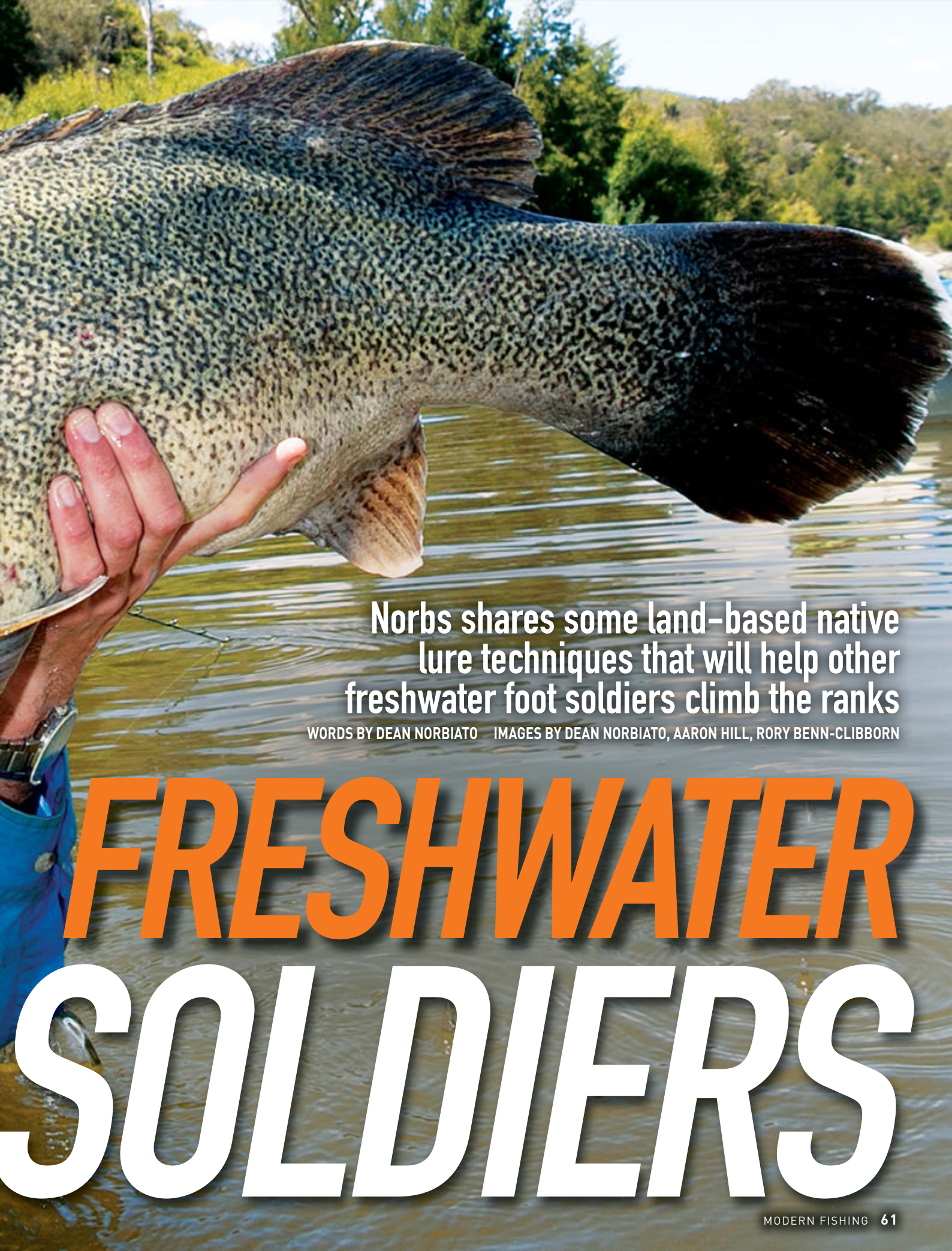


VIEW RANGE

DARCHE.
OUTDOOR GEAR



FOOT



Norbs shares some land-based native
lure techniques that will help other
freshwater foot soldiers climb the ranks

WORDS BY DEAN NORBIATO IMAGES BY DEAN NORBIATO, AARON HILL, RORY BENN-CLIBBORN

FRESHWATER **SOLDIERS**

It is where it all started for me. A fresh-faced junior at my first freshwater boot camp, armed to the teeth with a fistful of lures, a spin reel spooled with 30lb monofilament and an Ugly Stick that's tip could bend over and touch its butt.

It was 1997 and I was on the banks of the 'Bidgee in the Riverina in search of my first freshwater foe on a lure. I had read all that was available on lure fishing and felt I had earned my academic stripes, but needed to put all the study into action.

After trudging a few bends from camp, I found a partially submerged willow tree and lobbed my prized 75mm Oar Gee Plow to its furthest extremity. Wrestling with my cumbersome combo I managed to click the

reel in to gear and started to work the lure back to the bank.

As the silence of the river started to engulf the moment my reel let off an almighty scream, as my lure was smacked by an underwater assailant, who made an instant beeline back to the wilted willow. The noise of the reel was soon drowned out by my cry for help, as I was overcome with excitement being locked in battle with my first lure caught native. It didn't take long for my father, Dennis, to drop what he was doing and rush to help.

With years of lure fishing experience under his belt, courtesy of the pioneering Aeroplane spinner and Floppy, he was able to help navigate the fish into shore. With dad's hand

locked in the 60cm Murray cod's mouth I was overcome with excitement, testing the tape measure with my very first cast of the morning.

It was after that initial encounter that I earned my first freshwater foot soldier rank, as a very chuffed, Cadet in training. While this was the lowest rank possible it fuelled me with a sense of motivation to climb the grades.

Fortunately, climbing up several ranks since that initial baptism of fire, which is still tattooed on my brain, has seen me accrue a wealth of experience that could help any freshwater foot soldier – not matter what their current rank.



"To increase your effectiveness when fishing on foot, the easiest variable to control is your initial approach to a new spot"



Aaron Hill releases a cracking cod off the side of a steep bank he had been working



APPROACH WITH CAUTION

While there are a number of opportunities to increase your effectiveness when fishing on foot, the easiest variable to control is your initial approach to a new spot. As a young cavalier teen I would often thunder up to a new spot with the stealth of a newly born elephant.

What I didn't realise at the time was that your actions on the bank transmit and reverberate down into the fishes home. This can spook fish in several ways, from loud talking and yelling to the stomping of heavy feet on rocks and logs that run into the water. As a result you should always approach any spot with caution and present yourself as small and natural as possible. To further mitigate the risk of being made by your underwater opponent you should also wear clothes that blend into your environment like khaki, dark blues and blacks. Dress suitable to your environment and don't give the fish any advantage you can control. As you approach any new casting location you should always invest some mental energy working out the exact spot you want to stand. While this may sound straightforward it can be a major factor in influencing your catch rate for the day. How many times do you get to a river and want to cast right over to the other side. Thinking the proverbial grass is greener on the other side of the river, neglecting the real estate that lay at your feet. With this in mind I rarely, if ever, stand on the furthestmost point of a log or rock. After clocking up countless cod kilometres over my native journey I have trained myself to

resist the urge to leap onto the furthestmost point of a spot.

Standing a metre or two back from the tip of the area you are fishing allows you to fully work over the entire fish-holding region, especially the final section. It's important to concentrate on those last few feet of your retrieve, just when your leader is rising through your eyelets. Without question, this is the moment of any land-based retrieve that you will receive the most knee-buckling strikes. From a fishes viewpoint this is the moment when their potential prey makes its final dash for terra firma.

Its with this at mind that I always like to leave at least three feet of leader in the water and swim my lure right up onto the bank, resiting the urge to pull it out with more water to cover.

This can become painstaking at times but I've seen too many dark green figures materialise

out of the depths and maim my lure with only a few feet left on the retrieve. The reason I like to keep at least three feet of leader in the water is it gives you a greater ability to play the fish. On the flip side if you receive the same swashbuckling strike at your toes with no line in the water the fish will potentially snap, or choke on your rod tip because of the lack of 'give' between the rod and fish.

When fishing at night another factor to be extremely mindful of is the beam of your head torch. Avoid at all costs directly shining your head torch on a new patch of water you intend to immediately fish. What I would recommend is cupping your head torch with your hand so you restrict the beam to only a foot or two in front of your feet. Either way, it pays dividends to channel your inner commando, at day or night, and approach each new casting platform with extreme caution.



Camo Man. Dressed in dull colours Dean Norbiato blends into the background to fool this 90cm fridge with fins



TIPS & TECH



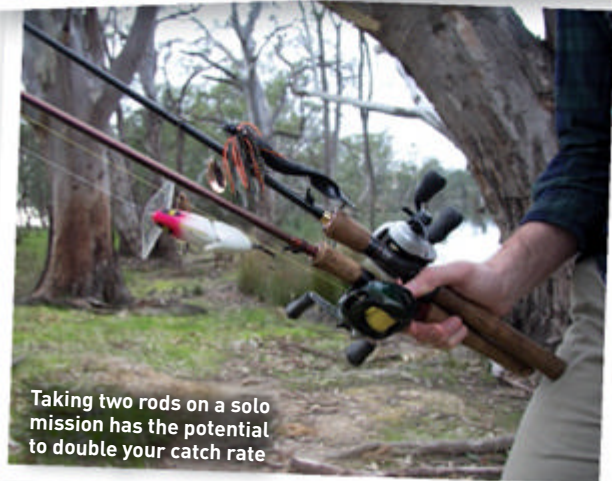
Be wary of the area you're accessing by foot as some areas are off limits

FOOT BRAWLS

When setting off for a fish on foot always remember to check if you are fishing on crown land or private property. I have heard countless stories of wayward fishermen venturing onto private property and getting into some very unsavoury situations with pent up land owners. One such instance involved a short scuffle, a shotgun and one very soiled pair of angler's undies. While I agree the firearm is an overzealous approach at protecting your patch, you have to understand that you would be pretty ticked off if someone were tramping around your backyard unannounced. As a general rule always approach with caution, look for signs and don't be afraid to check with the landowner if you are able to fish along the banks of his property.



You don't need to be boat based to score good fish!



Taking two rods on a solo mission has the potential to double your catch rate

Cod are the perfect example of the need to get the cast right. If you're not on the money you're out of the game!



PITCH PERFECT

Now that you have located the perfect vantage point to pitch your lure, it is time to roll out your casting strategy. As a personal preference I always cast at a 45-degree angle upstream and work the lure back with the current. From experience I have found it significantly more productive to work with the current, and not against it. My rationale behind this is simple – it allows me to work more water at the ideal pace for the lure. If I'm running my lure against the current I have to work it considerably slower to accommodate for the added resistance that the current generates. Fish also face into the current, which will see your lure waft past in a more conventional and natural manner. Maybe I'm just impatient, but going

with the flow definitely produces more native action and arced graphite.

This also has its advantages when you're working over a mid-water obstacle, like a sunken stump or boulder. It's no real secret that natives will sit in ambush in the slack water behind a mid water boulder, waiting for their next meal to drift down with the current.

We've also noticed that landing your lure with a watery thud, right in these back eddies can spook a fish sitting high in the water column. To counteract this we, again, always cast our lure well upstream of our intended target area and naturally swim the lure with the current into the strike zone.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

I've had the pleasure of fishing on foot with a number of native freshwater foot soldiers with varying ranks, each carrying their own personal tips and techniques. Once such foot fanatic with a wealth of experience is gun native angler Luke Rhodes, who covers more kilometres on foot in a season than most anglers would in a lifetime. As a result of this time spent trudging the terrain he has developed some effective and insightful tips to help keep an arc in his rod.

The most glaring difference from other native foot soldiers I noticed about Luke was he always arms himself with two rods. Initially and without hearing his reasoning I thought this dual pronged approach was overkill. Giving him the benefit of the doubt I soon saw the method in his madness.

By carrying two rods you can effectively maximise your fishing time by arming yourself with two different lure types. This means you

don't have to invest precious minutes retying a new lure if the new spot you're fishing better suits a lure buried in your backpack.

Also, if you have pricked a fish's interest with one lure that doesn't see him strike, you can capitalise instantly on the switched on fish by rifling in a different lure type. This is a sure fire technique that works especially well with a hardbody followed by a spinnerbait or vice versa. Two lures that are both very appealing to a native, but omit considerably different vibrations and pulses through the water. If you wait and retie a lure the fish's interest could wane and see he swim off in search of another meal.

Surprisingly it doesn't take that much additional effort to transport an extra rod if the terrain you are fishing isn't too rugged. This method is especially effective if you are embarking on a solo mission and don't have the luxury of fishing different lures in tandem with another angler.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

While it is beneficial to fish with an assortment of different lures on each rod, by far the most productive combination is a buoyant hardbody and a fast-sinking spinnerbait. The rationale behind this is simple.

This is similar to yesteryear when they would send a canary down a mineshaft to test the oxygen level. If the bird came back alive the mineshaft had enough oxygen for the workers.

From a fishing sense, you send the snag-resistant hard body down first to test the snaggy nature of the run, before cranking down a more expensive lipless rattling crankbait or spinnerbait. I don't know a fisherman alive who enjoys donating a pricey sinking lure to an underwater obstacle so this is a good way of helping to minimise your losses. Obviously you don't have the luxury of fishing from a boat and deploying a heavy lure-jarring tackle back, so preventative measures are always welcome when fishing on foot. The popular bow and arrow technique of lure retrieval is also worth a shot.

Simply point your rod directly at the snag and take up all slack with your reel. Then with one hand on the butt of the rod you use your other hand to sharply pluck up a length of line from between the reel and your first guide. Using the stretch and recoil in your line, this has the ability to flick the lure off the underwater perch it's fastened to.



Spinnerbaits are a great searching tool from the bank



“While you can learn a lot from reading and consuming literature there is no substitute for hands on experience”



Sun protection is a must for a long day in the blazing heat

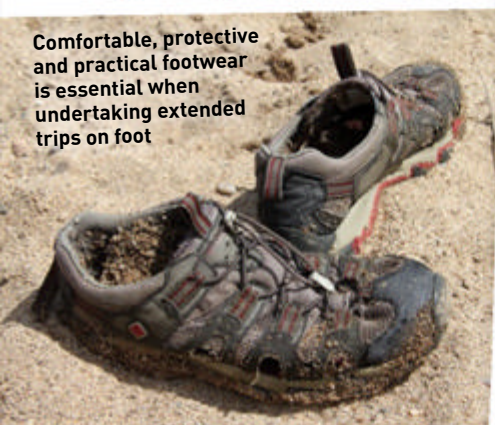
LIGHT SAVER

Like in the actual army, one of the best pieces of advice for any freshwater foot soldier is to ration their tackle and pack as light as they can. You need to strip back your fishing luxuries, ensuring all items are essential for your mission.

While this may sound contradictory, the first items I pack on every trip are a spare reel, spooled to the edge with fresh braid and leader, and a rod. I don't care how proficient you are with a baitcaster in hand, it only takes one momentary lapse in concentration before eagles start circling above, looking to nest in the overrun of your reel.

A similar lapse in judgment can see your fine graphite rod splinter into pieces with just one overzealous cast stretching to reach the shady overhang on other side of the river. These momentary brain fades can completely derail your trip, if of course, you don't take two outfits on your journey. Personally, when on foot I fish with a 6'6" Nitro Upgraded 2-4kg graphite

Comfortable, protective and practical footwear is essential when undertaking extended trips on foot



When travelling on foot packing light is essential



rod, a Shimano Chronarch ci4+ baitcaster spooled with 30lb Sunline PE braid and a rod length of 40lb Jinkai Plus leader.

With the two fishing critical items covered I then delve into packing an array of native lures that cover a number of different depths. Mandatory inclusions are spinnerbaits and chatterbaits, floating deep divers, lipless crankbaits and surface lures. I like to pack several bright and dark options, to cover both ends of the colour spectrum, in each lure type. I opt to store the spinnerbaits in a compact wallet, while I keep the rest of the bulky lures with hook covers in one deep, cavernous tackle box – simple.

Other essentials include a durable set of lip grips, retractable tape measure and a heavy-duty waterproof glove to ensure the safe handling of any native fish. Additional items that find their way onto every trip also include my Canon DSLR camera, spare leader, high-energy snacks, water, bandages, pliers and braid scissors.

To store everything I use a backpack that has at least a 30L capacity, with numerous external pockets for fast access to items like lip grips, water and pliers. Another tip for especially long treks is to add a couple of hydration tablets, like Hydralyte that you can get from the local chemist, to your water

to starve off dehydration and keep you focused on the task at hand.

Clothing wise I like to keep very sun smart and wear a long sleeve shirt, light breathable pants, a hat and neck sock. I also like to wear a pair of chest high waders when fishing in winter and a sturdy pair of quick irrigating shoes like the Columbia Drainmakers during summer. Obviously you need to scale up your foot and shin protection, based on the terrain and time of year you are fishing. A snake bite can quickly curtail any fishing trip and the appropriate armour must be worn if you are venturing into high risk areas.



Carry an assortment of lures but minimise as much as you can



A rusty old can can spell big trouble if the wrong footwear is worn

SAFETY FIRST

While a mission on foot can be a rewarding expedition, things can go wrong quickly and often being a long way from anywhere, you'll want to be well prepared for those freak accidents.

A few things to consider are:

- To let someone know where you are going and when you plan to return so in the event of an accident, you can be easily found.
- If going well out of range for an extended period, think of getting your hands on a Sat Phone. They are now relatively cheap to hire and could potentially save a life.
- Always carry ample supplies of first aid equipment and know how to use it.
- Be conscious of the clothing you wear making sure it's suitable to the environment you're trekking.

"I always cast at a 45-degree angle upstream and work the lure back with the current"



The author with a very golden yellowbelly that engulfed his Jackall Transam

WALK THIS WAY

No matter what your rank there is only one way to keep climbing the fishing ladder and that is by racking up the kilometres. Having a greater appreciation of the importance of your approach and controlling where and how you work your lure are sure-fire variables to help catapult

your rise up the ranks. While you can learn a lot from reading and consuming literature there is no substitute for hands on experience. I don't know anyone in the army who has earned a Purple Heart from behind a desk, so go out and get to it – that's an order! **MF**





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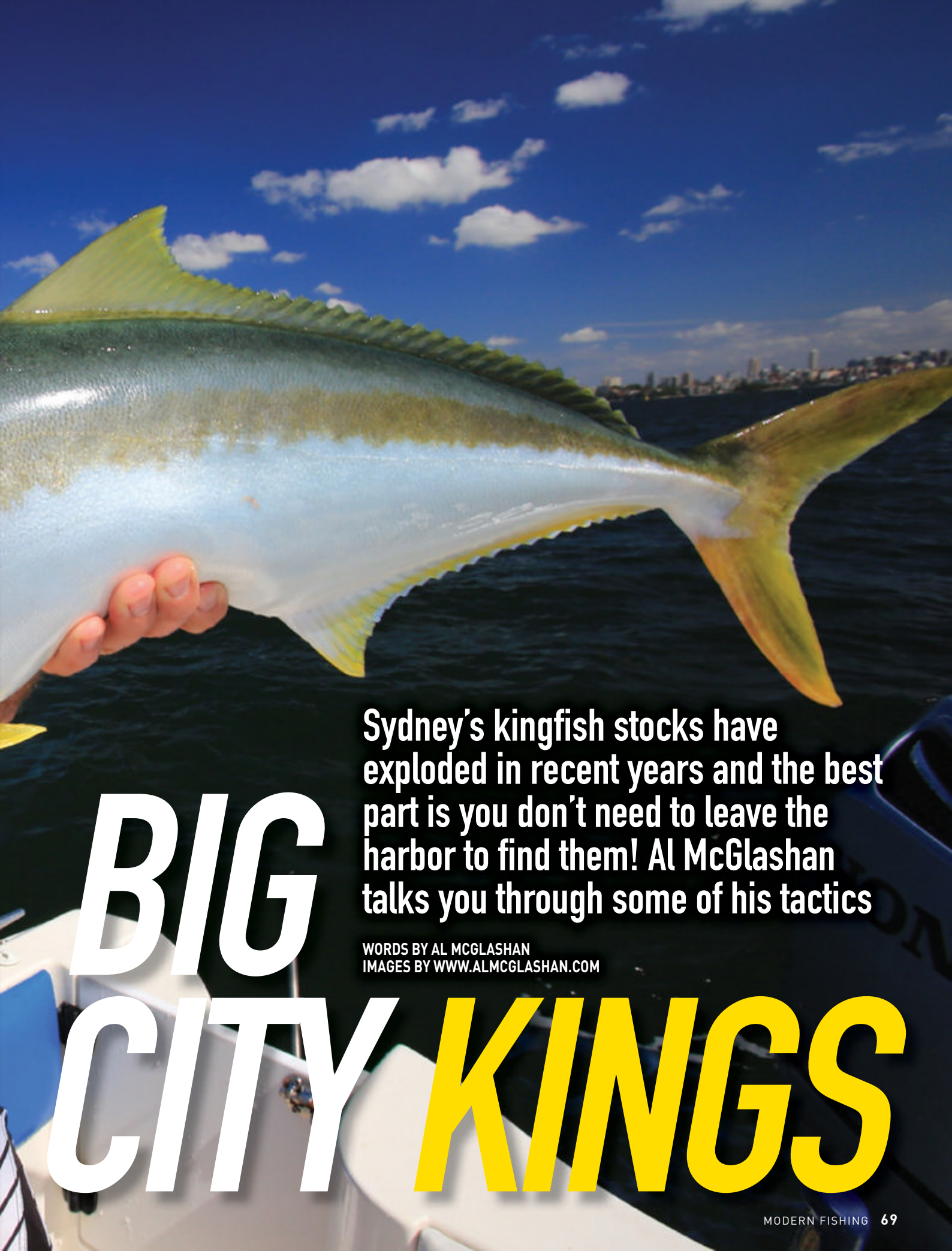
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SAVAGE
Pretty Tough







Sydney's kingfish stocks have exploded in recent years and the best part is you don't need to leave the harbor to find them! Al McGlashan talks you through some of his tactics

WORDS BY AL MCGLASHAN
IMAGES BY WWW.ALMCGLASHAN.COM

BIG CITY KINGS

Everything seemed surreal as we pulled up beside the oversized navigation marker aptly known as the wedding cake due to its cake like shape. As we prepared to drop a bait I couldn't help but notice just how busy Sydney Harbour is; a huge cruise ship chugged passed while a distinct green Sydney ferry plodded by in the opposite direction. To top it all off we had the city skyline standing out in stark contrast to the sandy beaches and bushland that covered the nearby point.

With a run out tide I slipped the Yamaha into reverse to hold us in position while Tom Spooner rigged up a live squid and sent it down into the depths. At first there was no signs of life then suddenly the sounder lit up like a Christmas tree. I tried to warn Tom but it was already too late and the rod doubled over as a solid king took more than a passing interest to the poor old squid.

The problem was that while all this was going on we had drifted a bit too close to the structure and suddenly Tom was in all sorts of trouble. Reacting quickly I pushed the throttle down roared away from the structure just in time. At first everything went to plan, the rod doubled over and Tom hung on for grim life as we tried to physical drag the stubborn hoodlum out into the open.

For a moment everything seemed to be going to plan and suddenly I thought we had beaten this bad boy but if there is one thing I have learnt is that you've never beaten a king until it's in the boat. Seconds later the fish realised what was happening and powered back home, obviously undeterred by the serious fish stopping gear we were using. The fish made it back to the structure and we were left speechless at the quality kings on offer in this magic place.

To hook such a big, unstoppable fish in what can only be described as suburban waters you would think it was a once in a lifetime opportunity, but it's anything but in Sydney Harbour. In fact these days it is becoming an increasingly common event.

Kinky numbers have come back since those dreaded fish traps and nowhere is it more obvious than the Harbour. When I came to Sydney 15 odd years ago kings were almost nonexistent in the Harbour let alone big ones and the capture of just about any kingy would be news worthy for the Daily Telegraph.

Well times have certainly changed and today they are literally a dime a dozen. Admittedly a vast majority of the fish are small in the 40 to 65cm range, but the big ones are present however and there are a few tricks you need to employ to get hooked up.



Al opts for a two hook snelled rig when using live squid around the channel markers

AL'S RIG

A Stella matched up to a Billistic jig stick loaded with either Icon or Powerpro 45kg braid may seem like overkill but this is what you need to stop these bigger fish. Down at the business end, things are very simple a 45kg fluorocarbon leader linked with a heavy-duty ball bearing swivel will help to minimise any line twist. As for hooks, I like to run a double hook rig for live squid while smaller squid heads can be rigged up on a single hook.



While there are some big kings around, the smaller summer fish provide a world of fun for kids and new people to the sport

A YEAR ROUND PROSPECT

Sydney kings were once a short term summer time affair, but now with numbers increasing they are becoming a year round proposition. In fact I would go as far as saying that they are almost guaranteed, that is right I can go out and catch kings any month of the year around Sydney, how good is that!

Having said that the bigger fish are generally encountered in the cooler months. During the summer months an influx of baitfish like whitebait sees the smaller kings actively feeding on the surface. As the season progresses the bait gets bigger and so do the kings, however unlike the little ones that can be seen feeding on the surface the big boys like to take up residence around structure, be it navigation marker buoys, wharves and reefs.

Interestingly we used to think the big fish left the Harbour during the winter months however, now thanks to the research done by Steph Brodie from Fisheries NSW we are discovering that they do in fact stay in the Harbour for some if not all of winter. Now her results are still in their infancy but their certainly is a trend indicating that the kings stay often moving right up into the upper reaches of places like Middle Harbour. This is really exciting and may offer a whole new fishery, if we can crack their code!



Along with squid, fresh or live cuttlefish make for a great bait if you can find them



Fisheries have been tagging kings in the harbour for some very interesting results

KINGFISH MANAGEMENT

Kings have made a spectacular comeback in NSW but there is still a real trend to kill the big ones. It's funny, you kill a big flaty or bream which are thick and you will get shot down in flames but knock a big kingy on the head and no one will say a thing. These days I make a concerted effort to release my metre plus fish, that way they will be there for someone else to enjoy in the future.

NO RUN NO FUN

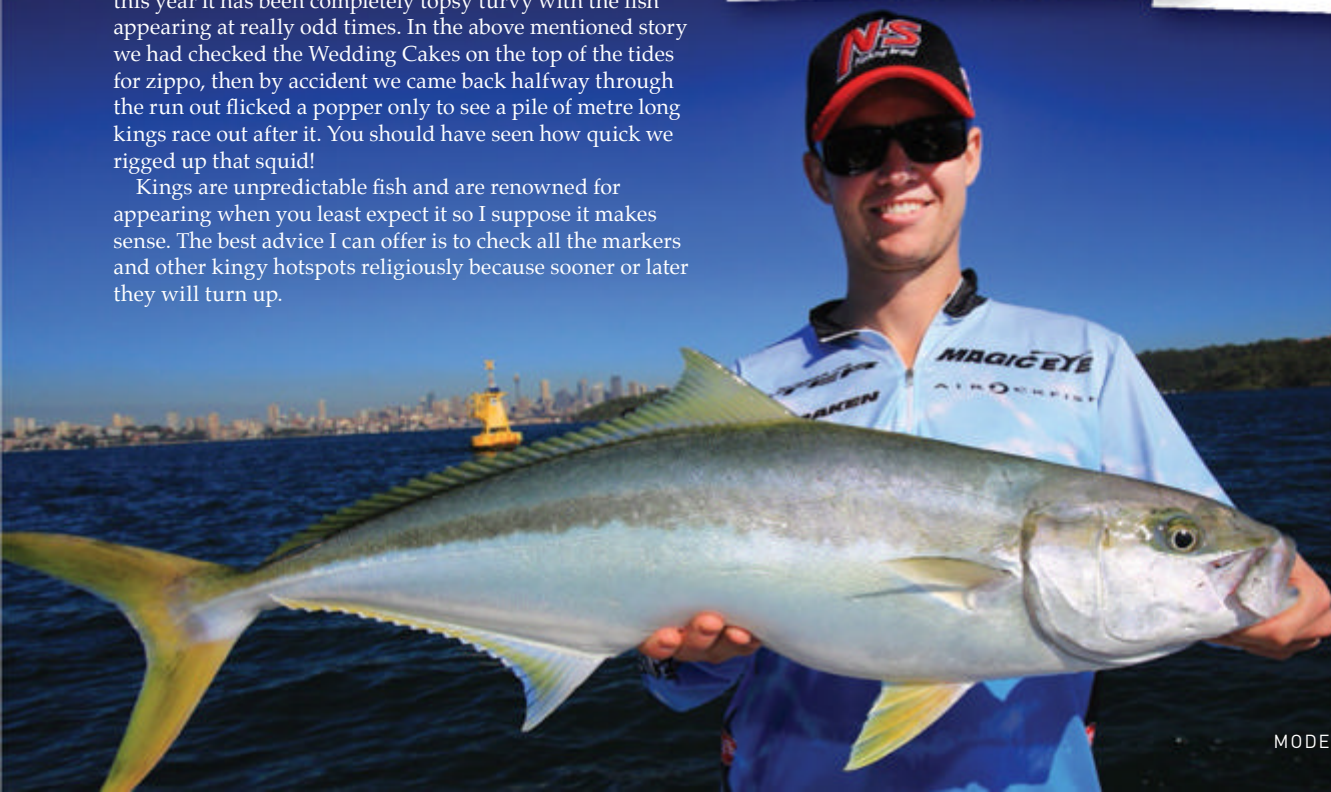
When it comes to time of day, the first few hours of daylight have always been considered the best period. While an early start certainly has merit, especially during the holidays when the crowds are out, but the tides play an even more critical role. Like estuary dwellers the tides dictate kingfish movements so understanding the tides is essential.

Kings become very active around the tide change so it's well worth concentrating your efforts an hour either side of the tide change but particularly the hour leading up to the tide. If you want to become even more specific then the flood or run in tide seems to be the best. It brings the cleaner blue water into the Harbour, which the kings prefer as opposed to the dirty green water that dominates the run out tide.

Well at least that has been the case until this season. In the past kingy action was almost like clockwork but this year it has been completely topsy turvy with the fish appearing at really odd times. In the above mentioned story we had checked the Wedding Cakes on the top of the tides for zippo, then by accident we came back halfway through the run out flicked a popper only to see a pile of metre long kings race out after it. You should have seen how quick we rigged up that squid!

Kings are unpredictable fish and are renowned for appearing when you least expect it so I suppose it makes sense. The best advice I can offer is to check all the markers and other kingy hotspots religiously because sooner or later they will turn up.

"The fish made it back to the structure and we were left speechless at the quality kings on offer in this magic place"



FINDING THEM

One of the biggest mistakes anglers make when chasing kings is to focus their efforts only in the deepest water. In reality the biggest influence in the Harbour is structure and some of the best structure like the infamous Wedding Cakes are actually found in relatively shallow water. This is particular so for the eastern one which is just 12 metres deep. What is worth nothing however is that all the good kingy structure is adjacent to deepwater.

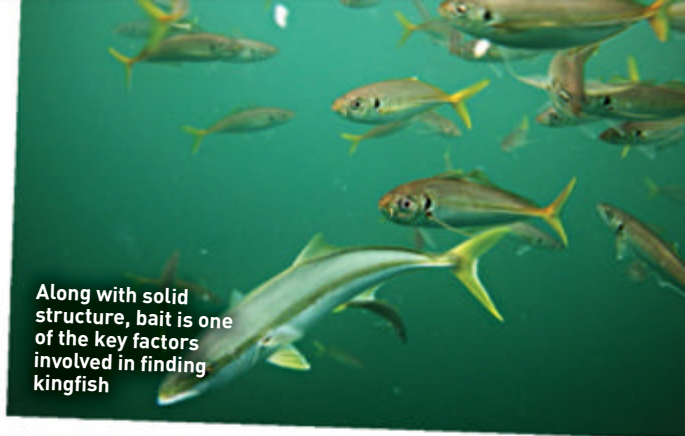
Manmade structure aside, drop offs and reef edges are also productive from the areas inside North Head to Clark and Shark Islands. The Spit Bridge, all the moored boats are also prime real estate, so as you can see there is no shortage of choice in the Harbour.

So what makes good kingy structure? Well there are two main influences; the presence of bait and current. As I mentioned above if there is no run there is simply no fun when it comes to tangling

with kings. So whenever you are looking for potential kingy holding spots, look for structure that deflects the current and attracts bait concentrations and there will be kings in residence for sure.

Finding Harbour kings is as much a lesson in dedication as it is keeping your finger on the pulse. In other words you need to keep checking all the spots to find them. One tool that is absolutely essential is your fish finder. Now admittedly my brand new Furuno 295 is a serious overkill when it comes to targeting kings but believe me they certainly can't hide from us. For a majority of the time kings tend to hold in the bottom third of the water column. They are easy to identify standing out as distinct red lines on the sounder.

Another tool I use all the time is the ever reliable Roosta popper. When pulling in to check and see if there are any kings holding we always cast a popper out to see if anyone is home. The amount of times fish appear on the popper is amazing but it does get costly with high lure losses!



Along with solid structure, bait is one of the key factors involved in finding kingfish



The aptly named Wedding Cakes are prime kingfish ground

"When it comes to bait there is only one choice to catch big kings in the Harbour and that is squid"

A SERIOUS BOAT FOR SERIOUS FISHOS



589 Ocean Ranger



619 Ocean Ranger



679 Ocean Ranger



739 Ocean Ranger



739 Ocean Ranger Hard Top

ALL ABOUT SQUID

When it comes to bait there is only one choice to catch big kings in the Harbour and that is squid. There are no 'ifs' or 'buts' about it, if you don't have squid you are not in the running. However, it's not just squid its only super fresh squid caught that day that works, even day old squid is near useless.

This is a far cry from outside the Harbour where slimy mackerel and even yakkas will work as well, sometimes even better than squid. Why this is so I have no idea but inside it's all about squid.

It really is that critical and if you don't make the effort then it's not going to happen for you. Harbour fishing guides like Nick Martin and Vic Levett spend more time chasing squid than they do kings, but on the same note get more bites from maximising their time with the best baits.

Another interesting point worth mentioning is that is not just live squid that work, in fact Nick's all-time favourite bait is the squid head. Ripping it off and then letting it sink down with a trail of ink oozing out drives big kings wild. Strips also work but live squid and squid heads are the pick of the bunch.

To perfect the art of catching harbour kings you must first master the squid

A whole, fresh squid head is one of the best baits to use in the harbour



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DRIFT RIGHT

When it comes to techniques there is no need to troll with downriggers as you already know the exact spots where the fish are going to be holding. Some guys like to anchor up which is great for holding you right in position but when you hook up, a stationary boat isn't much help to aid you in pulling that beast away from his home. As a result you end up losing more battles than you win.

The best approach is to position the boat up current and hold it there with the engine. This is where four strokes really rule supreme, although in recent years I have noticed a few guys employing electrics with that cool anchor lock mode. Mind you I should add they still have trouble pulling the fish out as the electrics are a bit slow.

If the fish are really thick I will only run one bait, simply because I don't want a double hook up. I know this sounds silly but trying to get a big mad king out of his lair is hard enough by itself let alone with two on the line.

I like to run some lead to get the bait down into the zone and then allow the current to drift it back towards the structure. Don't let it get too close, instead try and tempt the fish to come out a bit, that way you will at least have a little bit of a head start at pulling them out. If you get too close you'll have no chance!

Sydney Harbour is fast becoming a serious hard core kingy spot. Sure it's full of little ones but if you focus your efforts and refine your techniques to specifically target the big ones then you will hook up. Staying attached is a whole new kettle of fish! 

“During the summer months an influx of baitfish like whitebait sees the smaller kings actively feeding on the surface”



Poppers are a great way to probe the likely areas to see if anyone's home. If they follow but don't commit, switch to squid baits to get the bite

SURFACE ACTION

While this article has focused on catching bigger kings it would be criminal not to devote a few paragraphs to catching surface feeding fish. Irrespective of size, targeting surface feeding kings is heaps of fun and in particular they are awesome for the kids.

When kings are on the surface they act very distinctly. They rarely splash and carry on too much, instead they are subtle in their actions boiling and swirling when chasing small bait. Observant anglers will also notice their bright yellow tails as they work the bait.

Surface fishing for kings is an incredibly exciting way to fish, because you get to witness the strike sometimes right alongside the boat. Admittedly, most of the fish encountered on the surface are small so a 2500-4000 size reel matched up to a light spin rod will not only cast well but will also make

it a lot of fun to catch them.

The best lures vary but in recent times the newly released Halco 45 and 60 Roosta poppers have been deadly, but soft plastics, flies and even metals will work at times. When you do see a school working bait on the surface don't just rush up to it, instead take a moment to study it and see which way they are moving and then get around in front of them. Reading the school's movements is critical to ensure you're in front of them. It is also worth factoring the wind into the equation, remember you are casting light lures so using the wind to aid in casting will be a massive advantage.

Another hint I can offer is to cast accurately and always aim for the centre of the action or where the most fish are. This is where the most competition is so when you drop your lure in more fish are going to throw caution to the wind and try to eat it before someone else does.



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SWIM ABOVE WEED

Dean Silvester provides some helpful hints for fishing treble rigged lures in close proximity to weed



The author finds a fast, erratic action draws a more aggressive reaction bite from barramundi

Whilst American bass lures are what we base our bass tournament scene around not all of the lures convert straight over and some are typically overlooked as being too big for our Aussie bass. However the larger style lures are getting the attention more and more with our northern anglers chasing barramundi. As any waterway starts to feel the pressure of fishing, anglers start looking for something different to give them an edge. Stick baits and swim baits are one of the lures in particular, paving ways into possibly unfishable waters and continually proving themselves as a worthy weapon in every angler's arsenal.

HOOKED UP

Fishing dense weed can almost prove impossible at times with all lures aside from top water or weedless plastics. However the shallow weed flats with anywhere between 1 to 2 feet of water covering the structure are ideal for suspending stick baits and swim baits. The lure itself is often slow sinking but with the heavy braid and thick leader it will suspend or just have a slight sink although any slight action imparted on the lure will draw it nearer to the surface. Fishing weedless rigged lures reduces the hook up rate considerably; cue the swim bait wearing two sets of strategically placed

oversize trebles. Fishing trebles in heavy structure has its pros and cons, personally I think I end up landing more fish on the trebles than I would with the single weedless hook. Although at times it can be frustrating as they are easier to rub off in the vegetation and barramundi have an inbuilt ability to be able to throw trebles anytime they jump.

ALL IN THE WRIST

Strikes on these types of lures in shallow water are almost as good as top water, with the slow erratic retrieve, the strike is out of reaction rather than hunger. I prefer fishing these types of lures on bait caster outfits so I can land softer with a flatter cast, this keeps the lure out of the weed. I am also able to maintain tension on the line in flight so I am tight to the lure as it lands and can start the retrieve immediately without fouling in vegetation. There are several ways to fish these types of lures and it comes down to the season or the bite style. I like two basic methods slow or fast, with slow I will do long steady draws of the lure having it sway side to side with little action followed by a long pause. Fast on the other hand is more erratic, bouncing the rod tip in short fast continual strokes to have the lure flashing from side to side yet not moving a great distance. I find the latter method draws more strikes and predictably more intense strikes as it fires the fish up. Don't pass by a treble rigged lure next time you're in the weed.



While they do foul up more often, there is no doubt that a trebled lure offers a better hook up rate than a weedless plastic

PRO TIP

Run a long rod and heavy braid when fishing in dense weed, you will need all the help you can get to drag them out.



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Any structure like this adjacent to deep water and current will hold jacks without a doubt. Pulling them out will be nearly impossible but that's their appeal!



JACK LIVES HERE

This time of year the NSW North Coast and SEQ estuaries become a buzz with the talk of jacks but how do you find the right spot?

“Clearly the small mullet had drifted into an uncomfortable situation and was desperate to make haste”

My live bait continually bobbed away under the float as it drifted along the likely looking rock wall, the anticipation rose when the float started darting around more and more erratically. Clearly the small mullet had drifted into an uncomfortable situation and was desperate to make haste.... Too late! A large ‘pop’ sound reverberates through the line as the float goes down in a heartbeat and the assailant on the other end makes a lightening dash for cover, making it all the way leaving me with a bunch of slack line and a stack of excess adrenaline!

RECON MISSION

The above situation may sound disappointing but it's actually a good thing as it's the first indication that Jack lives here. While I would much prefer to target them using lures, there is nothing like probing a new area with a drifting live bait to get a good indication of whose home. For me, this is how I like to prospect new ground and not until I feel like I've sussed out where the fish are and when they bite, will I throw around a few lures for a bit of artificial fun. This technique can be used in pretty much any environment whether it be snags, rock walls, bridges or any other potential jack lairs and is so effective as it covers plenty of ground and a range of depths.

The method is simple; a small running


ball sinker along a trace of around 50-60 pound straight through to a suitable j hook for the size of the live bait. Circles are no good here as you'll have to set the hook so quickly the circle won't have time to grab. Above the leader is a small torpedo float that can be adjusted via crimped stoppers or a couple of split shots. Use this adjustable float to fish different depths until you feel like you've covered all the ground. If there are jacks there, they will rarely resist this method. The only problem with this is the fish has a massive head start when it takes your bait as there is generally a bit of slack line due to the float so lock up and be ready to act quickly!

LIKELY SPOTS

The good thing is that most of our Far North Coast rivers are littered with rock walls and bridges while SEQ waters are loaded with other man-made structures such as pontoons so there is no shortage of jack habitat but what makes one stand out from the others?

Current is a big thing. Jacks will congregate in areas where there is a likely source of bait flowing past in the current and they'll use breaks such as pylons, boulders and snags to ambush their prey as well as rest when they aren't feeding. Heavy structure is another important factor. If you have 5 pontoons sitting in a row but one is a particular standout as it is larger, sits deeper in the water or is older containing a lot of growth then you can bet your money on that being the prime location. Same goes with bridge pylons and wharves etc. One particular pylon may hold in deeper water or be of a heavier build, if this is the case then they'll flock to that like flies to a bull!

When hunting them in natural terrain look for the gnarliest of snags, ideally being adjacent to some deeper water and even better being situated around a junction of creeks or the outside edge of a bend in the river where the currents push hard and then deflect off the bank. This causes eddies around the snag and gives them the biggest advantage over confused baitfish that stray into the area with the tide.

Best piece of advice of all, go find some spots away from the pressure of crowds, steer clear of the well-known spots as they do tend to feel the pressure and they get fished out pretty quickly when people take them regularly for a feed. As they aren't nearly as common as they are further north I choose to release any fish I catch in these areas as I'd much rather see them still hanging around for years to come 

Jacks can be tough to find on the North Coast but some time spent on the water with the right techniques will see you eventually crack the code



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SQUID OFF THE STONES

Rocky platforms provide a productive base for reliable squid sessions as Shane Murton explains

One of the great appeals of chasing squid, besides the food, bait and fun factor, is the relatively straightforward access to productive locations, be they shore or boat.

When it comes to land based squidding locations catching them from the rocks probably isn't the easiest of areas to fish, but then again this can safeguard certain ledges from the shoulder to shoulder people traffic you'll see at other locations during peak season.

Rocky areas provide access to prime squid holding zones and we fish a variety ranging from reasonably sheltered ocean rocks, to various man-made structures such as breakwaters, boat ramps and more where rock-hopping is involved. A key trait of a rock hot spots for squid is having minimal swell or white water, and a favourable bottom type which can be any combination of sand, weed or rock. Depth is not overly vital, although 1-4 metres of water is fairly standard for us to fish.

Favourable conditions for this fishing are essential, as too much wave action and slop can turn squid off which aren't the strongest of swimmers, and it'll make it hard to effectively work teasers, baited prongs and jigs. It's no surprise a lot of the ledges we focus on are inside points and bays and receive a lot of offshore wind and could be classed as protected to semi-protected from the open ocean.


In milder weather I always prefer to have a fish bait or two out suspended under a foam float. These can be hookless teasers or fish rigged on a squid prong which is inserted inside the bait. If the XOS squid are running I like the hookless option for giving them a taste and keeping it natural, however most times you'll get them on the prong/bait combo no worries.

Weighted floats are handy for rock fishing and enable extra distance on casts. I also like to use

a longer rod, and often my surf gear (9-12ft rod), for working fish under floats as you can clear line from the rocks, make long casts and easily take up slack to strike on a squid that's nailed a bait a fair way from shore. Suspending baits and jigs above the bottom using floats is a great way to avoid losing a lot of gear also in rocky areas so there's many advantages to it.

Flicking around jigs is low fuss, works well and can be done in most conditions unlike working baits under floats. Seriously consider loading up on any cheaper jig options you favour for this fishing, even more so if the bottom is quite harsh. A lot of people struggle to get their jig down to the right depth off the rocks and fishing it as deep and as slow as you can is paramount, giving it maximum time to get spotted and eaten. If you value your jig collection too highly to sink them down near the bottom then probably give this method a miss!

Working jigs in combination with real fish teasers out is the most productive way to approach rock squidding, but the basic grab and go session involving a few jigs, leader and a flickstick is also hard to beat for the sheer simplicity of it.

Regardless of your squid strategy on the stones, how you land any inkers hooked is an important concern to be taken into consideration before you hook-up. A landing net is ideal if you can get close to the water, while dedicated extendable squid gaffs which give you considerable reach mean you don't need to put yourself at risk of slipping on slimy rocks or getting taken out by a rogue wave. Mates of mine have made squid gaffs up using old rod blanks and fixed heavy-duty prongs to the end of the blank for an even more ridged option and if you do hook the kraken you may be wishing you had something like this on hand. Enjoy! 

A quality squid caught by the author right on dark from the stones



From milder areas a landing net or some type of dedicated squid gaff are required to secure your catch



Sheltered rock ledges fronting water of a suitable depth and bottom type provide ideal platforms to get into a bunch of inkers



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CITIZEN SCIENTISTS

Highly respected Marine Biologist, Julian Pepperell is back in the pages of Modern Fishing with his monthly column on all things relating to the world of marine science

It's good to be back on the pages of Modern Fishing after a bit of a break – a kind of sabbatical if you like which, for a scientist basically means getting away, having time to think and recharging the batteries. Long-term readers of this magazine might remember my previous regular jottings on all things fishy, so allow me to pick up where I left off.

This column will be all about the world of marine science, especially in an Australian context, where I'll be trying to cover the kinds of topics I know anglers are interested in. These might include the life cycles of different species of fish including reproduction, spawning seasons, sex ratios and changing sex (or not). The senses of fish – vision, hearing, smell and touch are always of great interest as are movements and behaviour as revealed by old fashioned plastic tags and more recently, electronic and satellite tags. We might look at such issues as the pros and cons of artificial reefs and fish aggregating devices (FADs) and we will certainly consider conservation questions such as overfishing, threats to marine environments and so on.

We are fortunate in this country to have many dedicated marine biologists constantly studying the intricacies of the marine world. But more often than not, their work goes unnoticed by the angling public, since it tends to be published in the form of pretty dry and often impenetrable jargon-laden scientific papers that are simply not accessible to the average angler. Part of my job with this column, therefore, is to let you know what is going on in these scientists' labs and on board their research vessels and to try and decipher their findings of interest in an accessible way. But I will also be asking you to help science from time to time as well.

I've been working with anglers my whole

career and what has always impressed me is just how curious they are about the aquatic world and how they are so willing and eager to help with research. Tagging programs are good examples of how anglers have been actively engaged in research for many years, so far voluntarily tagging and releasing over 1.5 million fish in Australia on the NSW DPIs Gamefish Tagging Program and the Suntag project, operated through the Australian National Sportfishing Association (ANSA).

This kind of assistance, in which the general public is enlisted to help research has been recently dubbed 'citizen science', which, in marine science is especially strong since there are so many anglers out there – over 3 million Australians wetting a line each year at last count. That's a lot of eyes on the water.

One recent example of how anglers have proven themselves to be excellent 'citizen scientists' is a project called Redmap Australia. Led by Dr Greta Peci of the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) in Tasmania, the idea is to encourage the general public to report unusual occurrences of fish and other marine animals, thereby logging changes of distribution that might be due to climate change or other shifts in environmental factors. Check out redmap.org.au to see the extent of this excellent project and how anglers feature very prominently in reporting and sending in photos of unusual catches.

Another recent citizen science project with which I have been personally involved is a study of the genetics of black marlin undertaken by University of Queensland Honours student Sam Williams. Sam needed tissue samples from juvenile black marlin from both the east and west coasts of Australia to see if their populations differed in any way. He put the word around game fishing clubs, both directly and via social media, and was overwhelmed with the response. Anglers snipped small pieces of dorsal fins from over 130 released marlin, evenly spread between the two coasts, and from the DNA extracted, Sam was able to show that there were indeed differences, pointing to discrete spawning grounds in both the Pacific and Indian oceans.

There will be other studies that you will be able to help with, so this page will be a two-way dialogue. I'll be informing you of the latest research but at the same time, sometimes asking for help with specific projects. And, of course, I would love to hear from you at any time with fishy questions. Whether that might be help with identification of an odd fish, or a question about the marine world that's been bugging you, don't be shy. Drop me a line at julianp@internode.on.net, or friend me on Facebook. Over to you!



Julian has been working closely with research regarding juvenile black marlin, specifically the differences between west and east coast stocks, and it's everyday fishos that are providing the much needed material for the study



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Andrew Badullovich (wears G0H5 lens - glass lens, grey base with Mako HD filter and a green mirror finish) Fishing writer/presenter The Fishing DVD.

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GAINING AN EDGE



Fishing deeper reefs requires a better understanding of your sounder

Adjusting the 'gain' on your sounder is one of the easiest and best ways to get a better picture

There's no doubt about it, sounders are so advanced these days that for most applications running your sounder on the auto mode is about as technical as you need to get. On the Modern Fishing boat, I run Simrad NSS EVO II units and straight out of the box, this unit paired with a quality transducer was good enough to switch on and start fishing. But like most people, once you start to understand what your sounder is telling you and get comfortable with the basic settings, you start to wonder what else you could be doing to get a better or clearer picture.


For those who really want the edge and want to know exactly what is under the boat, there are a few advanced settings that you should be familiar with. When I say

'advanced' you won't need a degree in marine electronics to play with these settings, and if you use a unit such as the Simrad NSS units, it really is as easy as selecting what parameters you want to change and simply turning the knob to adjust. I've found that most of the time when I play with the advanced settings, it is a matter of trial and error as there are so many variables that come into play, such as water depth and speed you are travelling.

Let's have a look at 'gain', otherwise known as sensitivity, as this feature would have to be one of the most underutilised features on your sounder. I've found that this single function alone is the difference between a good reading and an outstanding sounder reading. As the name suggests, increasing the gain is going to let you see

weaker signals or readings on your screen. If you turn the gain up too much, the amount of clutter will literally blank out your picture and you won't be able to see any separation. Where this setting really comes into play is when you want better separation and stronger showings, especially when you mark a fish that isn't directly under your transducer. Because your transducer throws a beam under your boat in a cone shape, the objects on the outer edges of this cone will display as very weak signals, if they show up at all. Turning the gain up will allow you to get a much clearer picture of the fish on the edge of your beam or down deep in the water column. I personally like to have a fair amount of clutter showing when I'm sounding around and will typically only adjust gain up and down, depending on what speed I am travelling.

Your gain is a lot like adjusting the power of your unit. Remembering that the signal from your transducer will be weaker the deeper you go, because each ping has a longer distance to travel, it can be a good idea to turn your gain right up to the point where the whole screen is cluttered and work back from there until you get the best picture of the area in the water column you plan to fish. You will be amazed at what this will do to your fishing and can literally open your eyes up as you start to mark tiny baitfish and showings down in the deep. Of course if you are fishing on the bottom in deep water (50m or deeper) it is also a good idea to use this function in combination with split screen bottom lock and zoom in on the bottom to put those soundings in perspective.

At the end of the day, playing with your gain is a lot of trial and error, but it will do doubt change the way you use your sounder for the better. Don't be afraid to enter the advanced settings, as you can always go back to the automatic settings if it doesn't work out for you at first. But, understanding gain is a great way to understand your sounder better and get a better picture of all the fish you are missing out on! 



Adjusting the gain to suit the conditions is a must for better definition. Run a bit of clutter so you're not missing any smaller targets

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dedicated on-vehicle dynamic testing station. This torture testing environment is where each part first earns its stripes before carrying on down the production pipeline to be awarded its meritorious 'Milford' brand name. In a factory that features robotic processes and modern plant and equipment, Milford Towbars are examined almost forensically by a range of in-house and international quality standards. Designed to measure and monitor precision material and process results, Milford parts are produced to stringent ISO9001, ISO14001, ISO4801 and the international OEM standard ISO/TS16949.

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THE GOODS!

Here's a sneak peek at the latest gear to hit the shelves

SAMURAI LAUNCHES INFLICT SPIN AND BAITCASTER RODS

The Australian designed Samurai Inflict series represents the best of both worlds, Samurai quality at an affordable price. Over the last 12 months of R&D, using advances in technology and construction techniques, Samurai have been able to create a general estuary, bass and barra series built around quality Fuji components including K Series Alconite guides.

The K Series anti-tangle Alconite guides bring a touch of the high end to this affordable little package. The business end of the Inflict rods start with a responsive light blank which yields enormous power in the lower half. Carefully weighted and rolled using Mitsubishi Pryofil cloth and special resins to be suitable for both lure and bait fishing, the blank has been coupled with a full single duralon bottom grip

making them extremely comfortable to use for any purpose.

All models in the range are seven feet length and come in a one piece for spinning models and 1 or 2 piece for the baitcasters. Spinning models ranging from 4-16lb form the core of any estuary anglers' arsenal. For bass and barra anglers the baitcasters range from 12-25lbs with all models featuring a classy Fuji reel seat.



SUFIX SUPER 21 MONOFILAMENT

If you love the easy handling nature of monofilament line, but wish you had a greater level of sensitivity, make sure you spool up with the all new Super 21 mono this season and put more bend in your rod.

Sufix Super 21 is derived from high viscosity super nylon that is further enhanced during the Advanced Tempering Process to create a monofilament line that has only 21% stretch – approximately half the stretch of competing lines. The extra low stretch combined with superior knot and shock strength makes this line ideal for Aussie anglers who fish with both bait and lures.

Through the development of a fine diameter monofilament line that possesses low stretch characteristics, this has enabled Super 21 to have an unmatched level of sensitivity - giving you the confidence to time your strike perfectly once the fish bites.

Available now in clear 300m spools of 6lb, 8lb, 13lb, 17lb, 24lb, 31lb & 40lb. SRP \$11.95

For more information: Aidan Lewis, Rapala, VMC Australia, (02) 9780 8200 aidan@rapala.com.au

STORM SO-RUN HEAVY MINNOW

The Storm So-Run Heavy Minnow is a weighted casting lure designed to give you the extra distance you require when targeting fish busting bait on the surface.

Featuring a heavy-duty internal wire construction and VMC treble hooks, the Storm So-Run Heavy Minnow is equipped for battle right out of the pack. Cast it out, let it sink and flutter through the school or spin it back fast in order to trigger a vicious reaction bite.

Finished in a range of holographic baitfish inspired patterns. Available now in 9cm & 11cm lengths; weighing 28g and 42g respectively.

For more information: Aidan Lewis, Rapala, VMC Australia, (02) 9780 8200 aidan@rapala.com.au



WATERSNAKE DELUXE AUTO/ MANUAL INFLATABLE PFD

The new lightweight Watersnake Deluxe Auto/Manual Inflatable PFD Level 150 yoke adds an automatic option to the popular range of Watersnake inflatable PFDs that have redefined great value in boating safety gear, offering dependable high quality at affordable prices. The auto-inflate function on this new PFD makes it also well suited to rock fishers and sailing enthusiasts.

As the name suggests, the new model can be set to auto-inflate upon entering the water and can also be set to manual inflation. It is designed to meet the latest AS4758.1 stringent safety rating and is packed with great features:

The design includes a soft neoprene neck-liner to avoid irritation or chaffing on the back of your neck. It is designed to wear over your clothes and has a large 50mm webbing belt with a twin-tab synthetic nylon buckle for quick and easy fitting.

The tough and durable material is nylon Oxford 420D with convenient Velcro access for maintenance and servicing. It is rated for adults heavier than 40kg, with chest sizes 80cm to 140cm.

Watersnake Level 150 lifejackets are designed for general offshore and rough weather use, where a high standard of safety and performance is required. They are designed to maintain a fully clothed person in a safe position on their back with their head clear of the water without any action required by the user. The new Auto/Manual Inflatable PFD is available in red or blue.

For more information on Watersnake products, visit HYPERLINK "<http://www.jarviswalker.com.au>" [watersnake.com.au](http://www.watersnake.com.au)



THE GOODS!

NEW FIN-NOR LETHAL STAR DRAG SERIES

Fin-Nor has released its new range of Lethal Star Drag overhead reels—a versatile design suited to trolling, jigging, bottom fishing or even pitching live baits. The new Lethal Star Drag reels are available in sizes 16, 20 and 30 and all sizes are built with a solid all-aluminium one-piece frame and side covers.

The Lethal Star Drag's internal construction packs plenty of punch, with large bronze and stainless steel gears, for dependable cranking power and the strength to last the test of time. The drag system features Fin-Nor's legendary oversize MegaDrag heavy-duty carbon fibre washers, for loads of lock-down power when fighting heavy fish. The hybrid ceramic and stainless steel bearings offer excellent free-spool capability and all six of these bearings contribute to the reel's smooth feel.

The strength throughout the build continues in the MegaLock anti-reverse system, which uses a tough pawl and ratchet back-up, plus the speed of the 6.2:1 gearing cranks in up to 124cm per turn of the handle, adding versatility to the Lethal's list of advantages.

The Lethal LTC16 holds 450yd of 50lb, the LTC20 fits 540yd of 65lb, and the big 30 takes 675yd of 65lb braid, so you are covered for when the big fish bolt for the horizon.

Ask for Fin-Nor Lethal Star Drag reels at a good tackle store near you, or visit finnorfishing.com.au for more information.



NEW ROVEX AIR STRIKE ADVANCE RODS

The new Rovex Air Strike Advance graphite rods build on the Air Strike's hallmark affordable high performance, adding even better looks and some new models to the range.

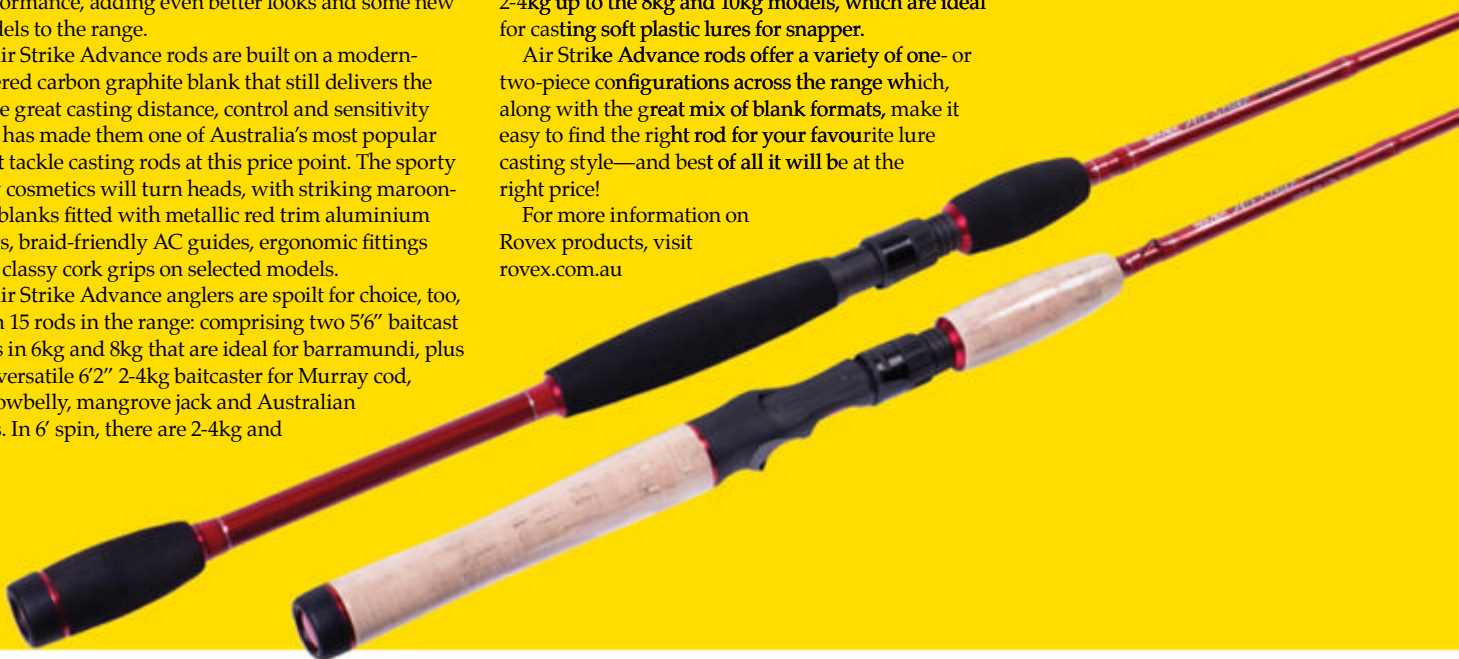
Air Strike Advance rods are built on a modern-tapered carbon graphite blank that still delivers the same great casting distance, control and sensitivity that has made them one of Australia's most popular light tackle casting rods at this price point. The sporty new cosmetics will turn heads, with striking maroon-red blanks fitted with metallic red trim aluminium rings, braid-friendly AC guides, ergonomic fittings and classy cork grips on selected models.

Air Strike Advance anglers are spoilt for choice, too, with 15 rods in the range: comprising two 5'6" baitcast rods in 6kg and 8kg that are ideal for barramundi, plus the versatile 6'2" 2-4kg baitcaster for Murray cod, yellowbelly, mangrove jack and Australian bass. In 6' spin, there are 2-4kg and

6-12kg rods; plus 3-5kg options in 6'6"; a very nice 6'10" 2-4kg estuary lure rod; and six options in 7', from 2-4kg up to the 8kg and 10kg models, which are ideal for casting soft plastic lures for snapper.

Air Strike Advance rods offer a variety of one- or two-piece configurations across the range which, along with the great mix of blank formats, make it easy to find the right rod for your favourite lure casting style—and best of all it will be at the right price!

For more information on Rovex products, visit rovex.com.au



TT LURES — ARROW MICRO JIGS

One of the most popular food sources for many fish species is the humble squid. The design of the TT Lures Arrow Jig is based on an arrow squid, complete with a quality silicone skirt for added realism and movement.

Balanced for casting and designed for vertical jigging the Arrow Jig is a versatile presentation with the skirt creating a seductive horizontal sink and triggering strikes on the drop, coming to life on a slow lift and adding to the profile size, without the additional weight of a larger jig, when retrieved aggressively or at speed.

The quality components and hand painted finish, realistic 3D eye, silicone skirt and chemically sharpened, heavy-duty Mustad hooks stand the Arrow Jig apart from others and it is dynamite on a wide range of inshore and offshore reefies, tuna, trevally, kingfish, snapper, jewfish, fingermark, cobia, amberjack, samsonfish and more.

Available in 40 and 60g weights in 5 colours.

SRP: \$15.95 (40g) / \$17.95 (60g)

www.ttlures.com.au

LONGREACH RIGS

If you're tired of watching your bait and sinker cartwheeling over themselves when you cast, reducing your casting distance, then this is the rig for you.

Black Magic has added a new product to their extensive range of pre-tied fishing rigs. The new addition is called "LONGREACH" and its aerodynamic set up allows the angler to achieve greater casting distances.

LONGREACH rigs are the ultimate in surfcasting rigs and feature:

- Two traces with Black Magic chemically sharpened high carbon steel hooks and long life lumo beads.
- One pulley rig complete with 'impact' shield.
- Optional floats to keep your bait away from hungry crabs.

The LONGREACH surfcasting rig won the 'best terminal tackle' award at the recent AFTA show held on the Gold Coast, Australia

Visit www.blackmagictackle.com/surfcasting



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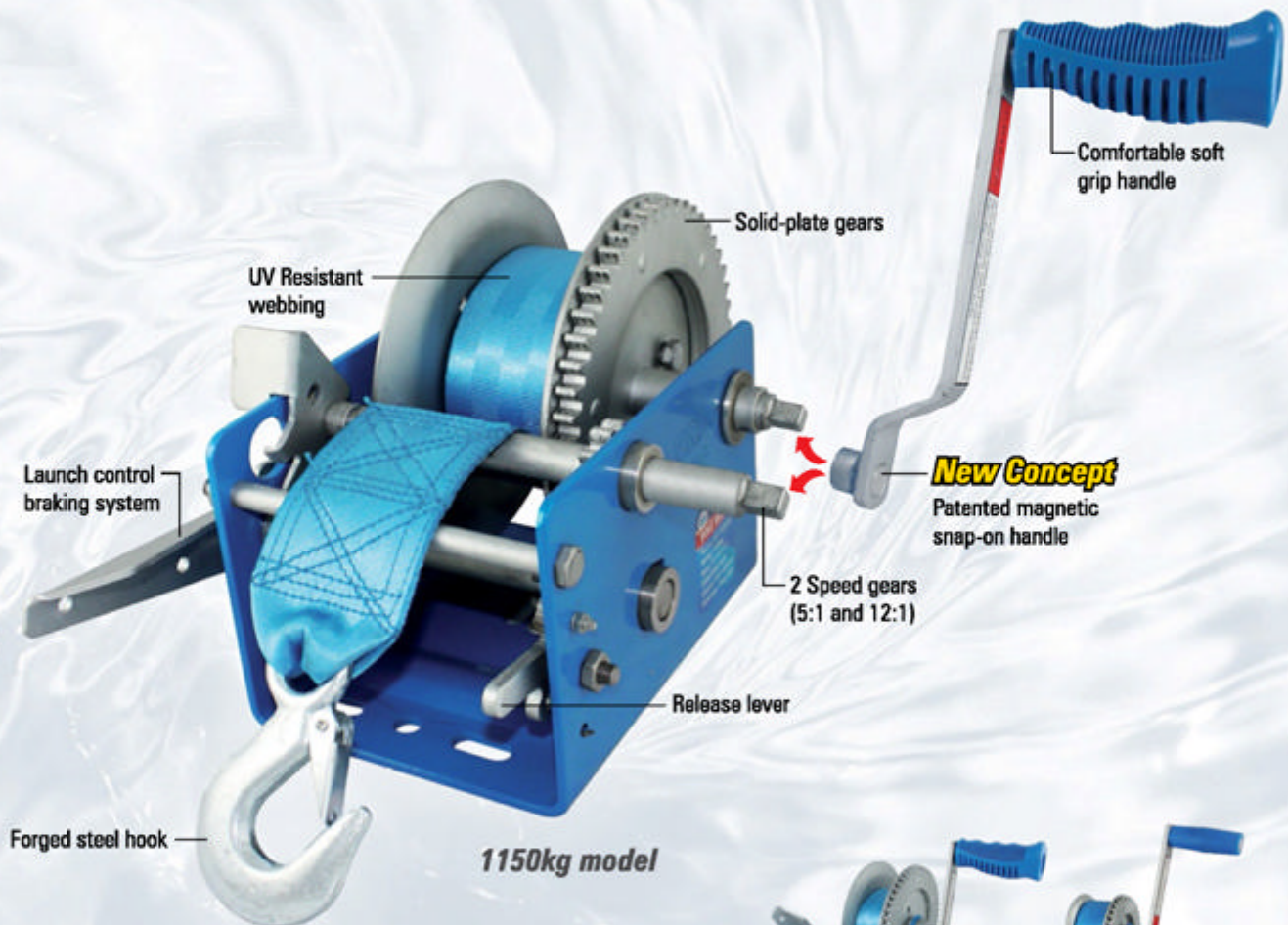
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3. Attach Hook

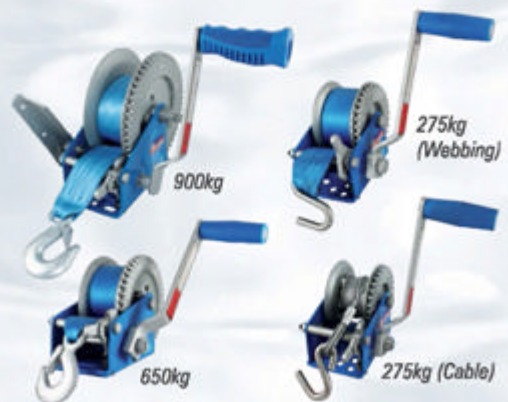
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